

Tom Conigliaro

Testimony of Tom Conigliaro

Good morning everyone, my name is Tom Conigliaro. I am a Vietnam veteran. I want to thank Senator Scott Brown and his staff, not only for inviting me here today, but for Senator Brown's uncompromising commitment to help our veterans. Thank you Senator Brown.

I served in Vietnam as a front line combat infantry medic with the First Infantry Division in 1967-1968. I was in Phouc Vinh, the site of the highest concentration dump of Agent Orange (1/2 million gallons) during the war. I am a lifelong non-smoker, non-drinker, and non-drug user. I am also the only person among my family and relatives to ever have cancer. A few years after my service, I had major surgery for a large mass removal of a lymphoma that nearly ended my life.

Fast forward to January 2005. I went to the VA Hospital in Bedford, MA, where I was sent for a routine chest X-ray. The radiologist told my primary care doctor of a tumor in my lung. Somehow, I fell through the cracks and no one ever told me of the silent killer growing inside me.

Fast forward, April 2008: The tumor took over so much of my lung, it created painful respiratory problems, I lost my voice and to keep the tumor from spreading, I lost most of my right lung. After recovery, I then filed a form 1151 through Vietnam Veterans of America, informing the VA what happened.

When I was unable on my own to reach a resolution, I asked Senator Brown's office for help. After a long two-year emailing and phone campaign from his office, we were still no further along. Finally, Senator Brown's assistant, Austin Lord, went to the VA in person on my behalf. Please understand, none of this is said with any kind of malice. The VA handles hundreds of thousands of veterans, and should be applauded for what they do accomplish with the resources they must work with.

With the help of Senator Brown's office, we were finally able to achieve a major breakthrough with my case. However, I am still waiting for the VA to address the form 1151 filed a few years ago, as well as meet with me face to face in a hearing.

Let me close by saying this:

There needs to be a rational process to facilitate the flow of information between the veteran and the Veterans Administration. Fortunately, having worked in the quality industry for many years,

I know of a procedure in place used among every one of the Fortune 500 companies that keeps them number one in their industries.

This same procedure used in hospitals in the private sector (if implemented by the VA and the VA hospitals) would dramatically improve not only the quality of care for our veterans, but would also streamline the flow of information between our elected officials and the VA. Additionally, the bar of quality in this area would be so raised, that the financial savings across 153 VA hospitals has the potential to save the government millions of dollars.

Thank you again to Senator Brown for all he does every day for veterans. Have a very blessed Christmas and blessed New Year, and God bless America. Thank you.