

Mitch Skaggerberg: President- Vietnam Veterans of Maui County

January 4th, 2010

Aloha Senator Daniel Akaka

Our Aloha to you, Senator Akaka, for coming back to Maui to listen to our current experiences and additional suggestions to improve about our VA Medical Clinic, Vet Center, & Vocational Rehab Programs and Services.

WE want to start with our Overwhelming Appreciation for the additional Nurses, Mental Health Doctor's, and & Admin. staff at our Maui Clinic Over the last 18 months. Our Veterans are very thankful for Your support Senator Akaka in getting us the additional Budget for these much needed personnel to serve our 2,000+ Maui Veterans. Using our VA Clinic.

We have seen a big improvement in shorter wait times to access mental health support for our 1,000 Maui PTSD Veterans because the hiring of an additional mental health psychologist and a mental health clinical nurse. Again, thank you, Senator Akaka, for procuring and advocating for the funds to get these two additional Mental Health providers into the Maui clinic.

A PTSD psychologist on Maui, Dr. Richard Sword, together with Professor Zimbardo of Stanford University.. has been using another new PTSD treatment method to treat some Maui Veterans that effectively reduce PTSD symptoms and treatment times. It's, called "Time Therapy" We would encourage the VA mental health providers to look at this method for possible use in our VA PTSD programs..

Our Vietnam Veterans also overwhelming support the current proposal to house all our VA Facilities at the Maui High School complex; being spearheaded by Our Maui County Veterans Council; and its Chairperson for this Proposal, Lloyd Sodeani.

And Our Wounded Veterans seeking Disability compensation need much more timely and consistent help in submitting and being provided with ongoing help to get their Claims adjudicated. We would like to recommend a Full Time Benefits Counselor be added to our VA Maui Vet Center. Currently we have a benefits counselor come twice a month from our Honolulu VA Regional headquarters; which slows the process and, in our experience, can cause unnecessary frustration with the Veteran. This could also help the VA reduce its Compensation Claims backlog, which is a top priority with our VA.

Many of our combat veterans who have their disability claim still being adjudicated(called CV in the system) cannot get their travel to Honolulu paid for by the VA. For much needed medical care. This results in withholding critical medical care for them since the care is not available on Maui.. WE believe they are entitled to travel.

Travel reimbursement is also being withheld for non service connected veterans needing critical care only available at Honolulu VA or Tripler. These veterans cannot drive to Oahu and are

entitled to care and the travel cost to get there! In both situations our doctors tell us these Veterans are needlessly suffering because of this policy. Can you get us travel for all these deserving Veterans Senator Akaka!

WE have also heard from Combat Disabled Veterans(many with ratings of 50-100%)that some of the medical treatment being recommended by our Maui VA Doctors is not being approved by our Honolulu VA/Utilization board . This has been an ongoing source of frustration with our Veterans care on Maui. Why have doctors if the Financial folks on Honolulu have the final SAY. For our medical care. WE would like our Doctors to have the Final Say on their Patients care.

WE need help also in getting our Guam Clinic a Mental Health Doctor. Because the budget for this position is 60% less than the pay in Las Vegas the VA cannot fill the position. IS their anyway the VA can fix this wide pay difference to fill the position? WE have already lost a highly qualified Applicant due to this pay issue!

Lastly, Maui Veterans seeking vocational rehab, specifically, the Independent Living Program, are upset at the procedure set up by the Washington , D.C. Voc Rehab Office to review and approve all Voc Rehab Program Applications by Maui Veterans . We find this policy has resulted in major delays in getting Maui Veterans their programs; many times up to two years.

Again, Senator Akaka , we want to thank you for your Tireless and ongoing assistance in the overall improvement of our Maui VA health care in the last two years Without your help, this would not have been possible.

Your truly,

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