

Norman Paulson, Junior State Vice Commander, Disabled American Veterans

STATEMENT OF
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Senator Tester, please accept my thanks for the opportunity to give testimony at today’s hearing to relate the transportation needs of Montana’s rural veterans.

I was asked to appear at this hearing to tell you about the difficulties and special circumstances surrounding rural veterans in Montana. I would like to share important information with you about the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Transportation Network in Montana.

The DAV vans are in high demand for rural veterans who have appointments and live far from the VA Healthcare facility at Fort Harrison and other cities in Montana.

Senator, at this time I would like to share some newly released statistics for 2011, regarding the DAV Transportation Network in Montana:

- The number of miles driven statewide: 1,201,971 miles, ranked #5 nationwide—an 18.8% increase over 2010
- Volunteer hours: 65,747, ranked #5 nationwide—a 22.6% increase over 2010
- Number of veterans transported: 24,775, ranked #8 nationwide—an 8% increase over 2010

These figures are staggering when one considers the fact that Montana has barely a million citizens, and it really drives home how vital the DAV transportation system is to all veterans—most especially the rural veterans—who live in our state.

The DAV Montana Transportation Network relies completely on volunteer drivers to function. You don’t have to be a veteran or a member of DAV to drive. It should be a fairly simple process to become a van driver. However, the application process is not a simple one, and it takes far longer than it should for the applicants to be approved. Many folks get discouraged by the process and often decide to not participate in the program because of the wait. The driver approval process should be streamlined so that more drivers become available to handle the large number of veterans who utilize our services.

Senator Tester, thank you again for the opportunity to appear today. I am open to answering questions at this time.