

Ranking Member Richard Burr

## STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICHARD BURR

Oversight Hearing

'VA Outreach to Members of the National Guard and Reserves'

July 23, 2008

418 Russell Senate Office Building

• Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing today. And welcome to our witnesses this morning. I appreciate your participation as we discuss VA's outreach to members of the National Guard and Reserves and I look forward to hearing your testimony.

- As we all know, the Guard and Reserve units have contributed significantly in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Over 430,000 brave men and women, including thousands from my home state of North Carolina, have fought in combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, providing critical operational support.
- For Guard and Reserve members returning home from the battlefield, VA has a wide range of benefits and services available to help them reintegrate back into the workforce and their communities. And for those who return home with service-related injuries, VA has high-quality health care services to help with their recoveries.
- But having these benefits and services available does not do any good unless our returning servicemembers know about them. It's important that VA and the Department of Defense supply our servicemembers with information about the services available to them in a clear and effective manner. We must make sure that they don't fall through the cracks.
- In recent years, VA and the Department of Defense have been making significant efforts to reach out to returning Guard and Reservists by providing briefings, mailing packages, sending letters, making personal phone calls, and increasing access through websites about health care and benefits.
- But, my hope is that today we will learn how well all of this outreach is working. We know that in recent years, VA has seen record numbers of disability claims, as well as a large increase in the number of veterans enrolling in VA's health care services. This suggests that something is working.
- What I hope to examine today is which outreach programs are the most effective, whether funding is being focused on the outreach programs that actually work, and more importantly, whether Guard and Reservists are being provided with useful information at a time that's right for them.
- I appreciate Secretary Peake taking the initiative and being creative in VA's outreach, but I also believe it's important that VA continuously assess each program to make sure it is reaching the right people and that the message is clear and easy to understand.
- I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the efforts to reach the members of our Guard and Reserves. VA has some very good benefits and services to offer and it is

extremely important that these men and women know about them and how to access them. I thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing.