

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

OPENING STATEMENT
Legislative Presentation: The American Legion
September 22, 2010

I extend a warm welcome to National Commander Jimmie Foster, his senior officials, and all the members of The American Legion who are with us this morning. The American Legion's proud tradition of service and advocacy on behalf of our Nation's veterans is truly honorable and I – and all the leaders of the Veterans' Affairs Committees --salute you for all you do.

In the final days of the 111th Congress, we look back at our shared accomplishments while looking ahead to continued opportunities to serve our fellow veterans. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I remain committed to upholding the sacred trust of caring for those who have served this Nation. This trust demands our veterans receive the highest quality of benefits and services – providing the best health care and rehabilitation – and ensuring fair and timely compensation to veterans for their injuries. In this time of war the 111th Congress has worked hard to equip VA with the resources needed to carry out these missions for years to come.

One major accomplishment was the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, which became law in October 2009. We worked closely with The American Legion on this new law that will help provide timely, sufficient, and predictable funding for the VA health system, the nation's largest health care system. Now, VA will be better able to deliver health care to veterans, knowing a year in advance how much funding will be available.

In May of this year, the President signed into law a bill I introduced, the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act. Thanks to the work of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, VSOs, and other advocates, family members of seriously injured veterans will receive unprecedented support as caregivers to their wounded loved ones. Also, as a result of that new law, veterans in rural areas will have improved access to health care, VA will continue to improve its efforts on behalf of women veterans, and homeless veterans will receive expanded supportive services.

With your support, we will continue to work to improve access to care for veterans. One example of how we are working on this is by expanding the availability of telemedicine. Senator Begich's legislation, reported by our Committee last month, will help veterans take advantage of this innovative method of care delivery.

On the benefits side, our two Committees are working to finalize a bill that will, among other things, improve on VA insurance, compensation and pension, readjustment benefits, veterans' employment, and burial benefits.

The timely and accurate adjudication of disability claims remains a significant problem.

Agreeing on the desired outcome of claims processing is easy: timely and accurate resolution of claims. How VA meets that goal is, of course, the issue. We cannot continue to accept a flawed system because we have been unable to agree on the perfect solution or because changing the system is too difficult.

I again thank Commander Foster and the members of The American Legion for your service and for being here today.

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