

SENATOR RICHARD BURR, Ranking Member

STATEMENT OF SENATOR RICHARD BURR

Hearing on Pending Legislation

Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this hearing to consider five bills currently pending before this Committee. I also want to welcome our witnesses here this morning and thank them for their testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I think the bills before us today are truly deserving of action by this Committee. Certainly, the issues addressed by these bills, particularly the issues of mental health treatment and traumatic brain injury research, are extremely important to our veterans. I want to especially single out your bill, Mr. Chairman, which seeks to expand treatment and research for substance abuse and post traumatic stress disorder. Unfortunately, too many veterans who suffer from PTSD are turning to drugs and alcohol to help them cope with their illnesses.

Thanks to the recent report from the Institutes of Medicine, we know that certain treatments work to help improve the lives of those suffering from PTSD. We also know that more research and work needs to be done in the area of treating veterans with co-morbid conditions, such as PTSD and substance abuse. Your bill speaks to that exact issue, and I am proud to be a cosponsor.

I also want to thank you and your staff for your willingness to work with me and my staff in making some minor changes - I hope improvements - to the bill prior to its introduction. You often talk about this Committee's long track record of bipartisan cooperation, and you have certainly shown it with this bill.

Mr. Chairman, as you know, recent reports to Congress from the Disabilities Commission and the Institutes of Medicine have presented us with a challenge when it comes to the care and treatment of veterans with mental illness, particularly PTSD. Both of these distinguished groups have separately come to the same conclusion: that VBA and VHA need to approach compensation, treatment, and rehabilitation of veterans with PTSD and other mental illnesses differently. I think we owe veterans our best efforts to not only compensate them for their injuries and treat their illnesses, but to improve their overall health and well-being.

I hope that this Committee will take some time to explore these new findings and consider ways we might be able to improve the VA system to respond to the challenges presented to us. I look forward to working with all of you to do so.

I would also like to compliment the Senator from Ohio, Senator Brown, for his bill on emergency care. I think his legislation is a fine example of what elected representatives do here in Washington. A flaw in VA's reimbursement policies was brought to his attention. He worked with the Administration to explore the source of the problem. And now we have legislation that enjoys overwhelming bipartisan support to correct the law.

I would also like to comment for a moment on Senator Dominici's bill, S. 38, by saying that I think any effort to expand the cadre of people who can help our returning war veterans readjust to civilian life is worth supporting.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I understand that next month you are planning to move forward a few naming provisions at a mark-up of pending legislation. I respectfully ask that you include H.R. 2546, a bill to name the VA Medical Center in Ashville, NC after Private First Class Charles George. George was a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians from North Carolina. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on the night of November 30, 1952, when he pushed a fellow soldier out of the way of an exploding grenade. Fully aware of the consequences of his actions, he absorbed the full blast of the explosion himself.

Charles George is an American hero and all of us in North Carolina are proud to claim him as one of our heroes.

With that Mr. Chairman, I want to again thank you for holding this hearing. I look forward to working with you and the other members of this Committee as we move forward on this legislation.