

15 May 2014



**S**  
**ERVING**  
**WITH**  
**PRIDE**

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chairman  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
332 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-4503

Dear Chairman Sanders:

As you know, the cost of war has always been extremely high and those forced to carry the major burden of that cost have been the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces. Unfortunately, the true cost of war isn't known until years after the cessation of hostilities; however, it is safe to say that, veteran healthcare is perhaps the highest cost of war.

Looking back historically, it was the realization that those who serve their country in the military, especially during times of armed combat, have medical needs that differ from their civilian counterparts, which originally led to the development of the VA healthcare system.

Unfortunately, the current spate of problems within the VA healthcare system are neither new nor unusual. At the end of WWI, when congress held a series of hearings to determine why VA hospitals couldn't adequately meet the needs of our veterans, it was determined that, at the time, the VA hospital system was a nightmare of red tape, inefficiency and neglect. The point here is that, from its inception, the VA healthcare system has been plagued by difficulties.

What is needed now is a complete culture change, top to bottom. This is not a problem/situation that is going to be fixed by merely appointing a new chief or chiefs; drastic changes will be needed at each and every level of the organization.

Now is the time to change the way we deal with problems within the VA, because one could almost compare the VA to the mythical hydra – an isolated problem arises and we either throw money at it or chop it off, but before we know it, 3 more problems pop up to take its place. It's been said that the definition of insanity is doing



---

**A M V E T S**

NATIONAL  
HEADQUARTERS  
4647 Forbes Boulevard  
Lanham, Maryland  
20706-4380  
TELEPHONE: 301-459-9600  
FAX: 301-459-7924  
E-MAIL: [amvets@amvets.org](mailto:amvets@amvets.org)

the same things, the same way and expecting a different outcome and yet this is historically how the VA has been operated.

It's time for the positives of the VA healthcare system to move into the limelight because there's been enough damaging media coverage and comments made during the recent hearing. Rather than complaining, AMVETS will be focused on developing positive recommendations for beneficial changes to the VA healthcare system over the next several weeks and will readily share that information with your committee when it is available.

In the meantime, AMVETS supports the suggestions already outlined in the FY 2015 Independent Budget as well as the following, for immediate deployment:

- double the patient load of all VA primary care physicians;
- tie future funding to the successful collaboration of federal agencies;
- raise the bar for all hospital administrators;
- identify best practices within both VA and civilian healthcare systems and put them into practice;
- enter into an open and on-going dialogue with all VA healthcare stakeholders;
- close the funding gap between the administration and the Independent Budget;
- appropriate funds for all authorized VA projects;
- allow veterans to make use of existing Community Health clinics to cut wait times.

Working together, we can eliminate the problems within the VA healthcare system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dean M. Zumatto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

National Legislative Director

AMVETS

301-683-401

[dzumatto@amvets.org](mailto:dzumatto@amvets.org)

cc: Senator Richard Burr, Ranking Member, SVAC