

**Statement of Ranking Member Burr**  
October 30, 2013

Good afternoon, Chairman Sanders, and welcome to the witnesses. Thank you all for joining us to consider bills that would affect a range of veterans' benefits and services.

To start with, I want to offer a few observations about today's agenda. First of all, for many of the programs that these bills would change, the Committee has not had oversight hearings to examine what gaps or inefficiencies may exist. Also, there are dozens of bills on the agenda, even though we can only thoroughly cover a handful of bills during a legislative hearing. And, we are again considering many bills that have significant costs but do not include any suggestions for how to pay for them.

So, I hope that, as we consider what bills should be advanced, the Committee will take steps to ensure that we have a clear understanding of how well existing programs are working; what changes are truly needed; and how much any changes would cost. We should also find ways to pay for any needed legislation, so we do not continue to saddle future generations with crushing debt.

Before I turn it back to you, Mr. Chairman, I want to briefly mention two bills I introduced that would provide straight-forward solutions for on-going issues. First, is the Veterans Dialysis Pilot Program Review Act. In 2009, VA created a Dialysis Pilot Program at four VA medical centers to provide dialysis treatment in local communities using VA clinics. Now, VA intends to roll out this program nationally, while at the same time contracting for an independent analysis of how well it is working.

But, in my view, the pilot should be properly evaluated before starting a national program. So, this bill would direct VA to halt any new VA dialysis clinics until: the pilot sites have been open for at least two years, an independent analysis of all four pilot sites is conducted, and a report of that analysis is submitted to Congress. The only intent of this bill is to ensure that, before VA creates a national program, we first figure out if that would be in the best interests of veterans and taxpayers.

I also introduced a bill in response to several recent quality management issues at VA medical facilities that have, unfortunately, resulted in patient harm and death. These issues ranged from the mis-use of insulin pens, to an outbreak of legionella, to delays in patient care. This bill would address the overarching themes that were identified as contributing to the poor quality of care in all of these incidents, by taking steps such as requiring VA to have an up-to-date policy about reporting certain infectious diseases and to develop performance measures to assess how well those policies are followed.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you to advance these and other bills that would address real needs without adding to our nation's fiscal challenges.

I thank the Chair.