

OPENING STATEMENT Senator Jay Rockefeller

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Opening Statement
DoD-VA Collaboration Oversight Hearing
January 23, 2007

Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Craig, I want to thank you for your dedication and commitment to oversight and bipartisanship ? both are enormously important. I look forward to working closely with you. We truly have a moral obligation to meet the needs of our veterans ? both those returning from combat today, and our older veterans from previous eras.

The plans and reports on DoD ?VA coordination and collaboration are important and vital. I appreciate your efforts to get the formal plans and agreements in place and underway.

But, as encouraging as the testimony is today, this is not what I hear when I talk privately with West Virginia soldiers at roundtables back home. It is not what my caseworkers hear from veterans and their families in calls to our office. I believe we are making a good start, but there must be the adequate funding commitments and top leadership to make the promises of collaboration work. A promise made to veterans must be kept.

We need to push harder to help our veterans with cooperation and coordination. Given the nature of the combat and the huge stress involved, we must improve our mental health services and our outreach for such services. I support the VA effort to expand both the staff and the number of Vet Centers to serve our veterans. I also want to work with Chairman Akaka to give our National Guard and Reservists 5 years of access to VA care, instead of the current 2 years.

Plus, we must take additional efforts to help our National Guard and Reservists who in recent years have been playing a bold and extraordinary role in our Armed Services. We need to recognize this and deal with unique challenges facing our Guard and Reserves, as well as their families.