

Senator Jay Rockefeller

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Written Statement – Senate Veterans Affairs Mark Up  
August 5, 2010

Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Burr, thank you for this mark up on a variety of pending bills to help our veterans. Throughout my Senate career, I have been a proud member of this committee, and proud that regardless of political rhetoric, our committee is dedicated to pursuing action on behalf of our veterans.

Today's agenda, which has my full support, is an ideal example. There are bills to improve implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bills; a bill to promote other employment initiatives; a bill for telehealth and other health improvements; and legislation to deal with the handling of VA claims. It is a broad agenda for improvements, and needed.

The Post 9/11 GI bill is an extraordinary initiative to help veterans make a success transition to civilian life and earn a degree. Over 8,000 West Virginia veterans are using VA educational benefits, and I believe that number will increase this September and into the future. In addition to improving the implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, I am proud that my state and all of our campuses are working to create a "veteran friendly" environment to provide other supported to help our veterans succeed. Our State Higher Education Policy Council hosted a statewide meeting in July to bring VA Vet Center leaders together with educators to discuss potential partnerships to help our veterans.

Health care is always a priority for me, and I am deeply committed to promoting telehealth in VA and throughout all health care programs. We must harness the power of technology to improve the quality of health for everyone, but particularly for rural veterans.

The legislation regarding improvements of VA claims may be technical in nature, but it is essential for veterans and families waiting for decisions. My teams of caseworkers tend to handle about 800 VA claims each year. Actions to streamline the VA claim's process are necessary and needed.