

Ranking Member Richard Burr

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to our witnesses this morning.

We are here to look at the adequacy of health care services VA provides to a growing number of individuals who have proudly worn the nation's uniform – women veterans.

The statistics don't lie:

- In 1990 there were 1.2 million women veterans; today there are 1.8 million, a number that will continue to grow.
- In 1990 women represented 4 percent of the veterans' population; today they represent nearly 8 percent.
- North Carolina is no stranger to this growth. My home state ranks 6th in the total number of women veterans, with just under 67,000 residing there.
- 14% of the Active Duty force is comprised of women, many of whom have served in combat or war zones. They fly combat aircraft, man missile placements, serve on ships in dangerous waters, drive convoys in areas at risk of ambush...in short, our military and our country are heavily dependent on the service of women. We must honor their service by ensuring VA's health care system meets their unique needs.

As we move forward to do that, there is one more statistic that I'd like to call to everyone's attention...one that suggests we have some work to do to.

- According to VA budget submissions, in 2007 just over 146,000 women veterans used gender-specific health care services at VA.
- In 2008, despite the growing number of women veterans that I talked about, there were over 141,000 users of the system...a decline of 3 percent from one year to the next.

The question this Committee must ask is, why?

- Do women veterans feel comfortable coming to a hospital system largely comprised of male patients?
- Does VA provide the unique services required by women veterans?
- Does it provide these services in enough locations to make travel convenient?
- When VA cannot provide quality care, does it use services that already exist in the community that are specific to the needs of women?

These are all questions I am hopeful our panelists can help us answer.

Mr. Chairman, just across the Potomac River stands the Women In Military Service for America Memorial. That Memorial serves as the ceremonial entrance of Arlington National Cemetery. I think its placement at the front gate of America's most hallowed military cemetery is symbolic.

For many years, the service of military women often went overlooked and unheralded. We now know better. As former Senator Bob Dole said at its dedication 12 years ago, the Memorial serves as (quote) "a lens through which we can better see and appreciate the dedication and sacrifice of American service women." (unquote).

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today. I hope today they can serve as the “lens” through which this Committee can see where improvements need to be made for women who have served in the military.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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