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BUSINESS MEETING

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2021

United States Senate,
Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
Washington, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:56 a.m.,
in Room S-216, The Capitol, Hon. Jon Tester, Chairman of the
Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Tester, Murray, Brown, Hirono,
Manchin, Hassan, Moran, Boozman, Cassidy, Sullivan, and
Tuberville.

Chairman Tester. I want to call this Senate Veterans'
Affairs Committee to order.

Is there a motion to move the 13 pending agenda items
en bloc by voice vote?

Senator Moran. Mr. Chairman, I move the Committee on
Veterans' Affairs favorably report agenda items 1 through 13
en bloc by voice vote.

Chairman Tester. Is there a second?

Senator Manchin. Second.

Chairman Tester. Okay, the vote is on the motion to
favorably report the pending agenda items 1 through 13. All
in favor of reporting agenda items 1 through 13 favorably,
say aye.

1 [Chorus of ayes.]

2 Chairman Tester. All opposed, say nay.

3 [No response.]

4 Chairman Tester. The yeas appear to have it.

5 The agenda items 1 through 13 are reported.

6 I ask unanimous consent that in preparing the agenda
7 items for report, the Committee staff be authorized to make
8 any required clerical, technical, and conforming changes.

9 I will turn it over to you, Senator Moran.

10 Senator Moran. My colleagues on the Committee, I have
11 a somewhat lengthy statement, so you may consider yourself
12 dismissed if you would like.

13 [Laughter.]

14 Chairman Tester. Thanks for everybody being here, by
15 the way.

16 Senator Moran. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for including
17 GHAPS on today's markup agenda and allowing me to make a
18 statement about my bill.

19 Based on assurances from officials at the Department of
20 Veterans Affairs, I have chosen to withhold for now a part
21 of that legislation that would codify MISSION Act access
22 standards for veterans seeking care in the community.

23 While I remain steadfast in my belief that these access
24 standards have worked well for veterans, and they are
25 familiar, they are well-known quantities, and were developed

1 in a well-reasoned and thoughtful manner, I am willing to
2 give the Secretary the benefit and hold off as the
3 Department works to carry out its assessment of the access
4 standards, as mandated by the MISSION Act.

5 Before this Committee last month, Dr. Upton guaranteed
6 to me that he and the Secretary, Secretary McDonough, would
7 want to maintain "the utmost best access for our veterans,"
8 and that the Department remains committed to working with
9 the Committee to "ensure that access is available to
10 veterans."

11 At the same hearing in June, the American Legion
12 testified that these access standards are "crucial to the
13 success of the MISSION Act," and if applied uniformly across
14 the VA and the Third Party Administrator networks, "would
15 facilitate access across the board in a fair standard."

16 I agree with the American Legion and their members.

17 These standards are a minimum standard that we should
18 try to improve on. Codifying these standards as a baseline
19 is the right thing to do, and they should not be altered in
20 any way that places a greater burden on the veteran or
21 reduces his or her access to care.

22 While Dr. Upton testified that he did not expect the
23 review to yield more lax standards, which would result in
24 longer wait and drive times for our veterans, I expect the
25 Department to follow through on their pledge of transparency

1 and collaboration throughout their review process.

2 I am not backing away from my recognition that these
3 access standards are working and that veterans have come to
4 depend on them. I am hopeful that the Secretary will follow
5 through on the commitments made before the Committee and I
6 stand ready to work with the Department to make certain that
7 veterans who served continue to have a reliable and robust
8 way to obtain the VA care they need where and when they need
9 it.

10 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman Tester. Thank you, Senator Moran.

12 Is there any further business to come before the
13 Committee?

14 [No response.]

15 Chairman Tester. We are adjourned.

16 [Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the Committee was
17 adjourned.]

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