

WEST HAWAII VETERANS COUNCIL, INC.
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August 13, 2014

Honorable Senator Mazie K. Hirono
Committee on Veterans Affairs
3106 Prince Kuhio Federal Bldg
Honolulu, HI 96850

Dear Senator:

First, thank you for the privilege of being invited to testify at your field hearing regarding the VA Health Care in Hawaii.

The island of Hawaii has some very unique geographic challenges. This island has eleven climate zones and is home to several mountains, with two of them being over 13,000 feet in elevation. The Big Island has an area of 5000 square miles of land and water. It is larger than all the other islands combined. The 2010 census shows the island population at 1,850,000, with the largest city of Hilo only having 43,000. The veterans population is estimated to be 18,000 plus. All of the above conditions produce an extensive rural population with many *small* towns and villages. Travel to a medical facility for our veterans is a hardship, can be 70 miles plus and take a number of hours to reach. All of these conditions validate the need for the benefits outlined in your July 28, 2014 media release to be included in Federal legislation.

The average time from contacting the VA and seeing a doctor is about 45-60 days. There are only two facilities on the island, one in Hilo and the other one in Kailua-Kona. These facilities are 75 miles apart and only have one doctor each. Specialty care can take at least another 30 days. Some specialty care can be done on island but, many need to travel to Tripler hospital in Honolulu on O'ahu, which can be a costly event. Depending on the circumstances and whether the care needed is service connected or not, *who* pays for the travel can be a difficult process to work out.

One example is that of WWII veteran Don Seki, who served honorably with the 442nd and lost his left arm in France. The attached is an email I received detailing his experience with the VA system.

After having received a great deal of input from veterans, veterans' organizations, support groups, citizens of the communities, and government officials at all levels, the following are recommendations for improvements the VA can implement to better serve the veterans of Hawaii, the Big Island.


First we need two "full service" clinics with more doctors which would require much larger facilities. In conjunction with the clinics a "one stop" veteran facility. This would include federal and state veteran offices, meeting rooms, full kitchen, and dining area for veterans to meet and converse while attending their various appointments.

West Hawaii Veterans Council, Inc. is currently in the planning and design phase of such a facility in the Kailua-Kona area. Thanks must go to Cindy Evans, Hawaii State Representative, from the Big Island for securing a \$300,000 capital improvement fund. It was estimated this would be a five year project, with a cost of \$15 million. Where those funds will come from is yet to be determined. This project will need the full cooperation of local, state and federal entities to complete.

It should be noted that a similar facility is being developed in Hilo, which further demonstrates the need for two facilities on the Big Island.

The veterans have done their duty, it is time for the government to provide the care earned and deserved!!

Respectfully submitted,

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Robert E. Strickland,
President West Hawaii Veterans Council, Inc.
USMC, Vietnam Veteran, 80% disabled
Trustee, VFW post 12122, Kailua-Kona, HI
Past Commandant, Marine Corps League, Detachment 14, Fresno, CA

ALJgust 11,2014

Aloha Bob,

I am writing to express our appreciation to the VA in Kailua-Kona and on O'ahu.

My father, Noboru Don Seki (442nd RCT) formerly of Honolulu and Long Beach, CA, recently relocated to Kailua-Kona with his daughter, Tracey Seki Matsuyama in December 2012.

Upon arrival, he broke his hearing aids and lost his glasses.

He made an appointment with his primary care provider which took a while and was given a referral to make appointments with the sub-contracted offices which took weeks.

He finally received his new hearing aids and glasses in the month of May.

Recently, we receive a call from the VA to assist with a new prosthesis (left arm) to be able to fish again. It only took a couple of days to schedule a fitting, and make a cast to prepare for his new arm.

Also, we are able to apply for a HISA packet to remodel their new home with ADA standards. We will have to wait 2 weeks due to his primary care provider attending many meetings on O'ahu but the staff at the Kona office have been very supportive and helpful.

We are blessed and sorry that Gen. Shinseki had to step down to make my father's comfort, safe and happy at his age and health.

Thank you for all the kokua for our veterans

Respectfully,

Tracey Seki Matsuyama for Noboru Don Seki.
