

**Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing**  
**Recruitment, Retention and Building a Resilient Veterans Health Care Workforce**

Opening Statement of Chairman Jerry Moran  
Wednesday, July 01, 2020

---

*(As Prepared for Delivery)*

“Good afternoon, everyone. The committee will come to order.

“We are here to discuss the Veterans Health Administration’s workforce and the resources VA uses for recruitment, retention, and resiliency of that workforce. First, I want to thank the 350,000 employees of VHA for the hard work they do day after day to care for our veterans. I have met a number of these professionals since serving in Congress and have always admired their dedication to the mission of helping veterans. We know that in many instances, these men and women are going above and beyond to help provide the customer service our veterans deserve.

“This is especially true as our frontline VA health care workers fight against COVID-19. I was inspired by the story of Gary Kramer, an intensive care unit nurse at the Dole VA Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas. Gary has gone the extra mile in caring for his patients suffering from COVID-19, offering up his own phone so patients could connect with loved ones unable to be by their side during their final days.

“VA health care workers serve our veterans because they believe in the mission, and that is exactly the kind of person we want serving our veterans. But we know VHA has a number of vacancies, including 27 occupations listed as critical shortages by the Office of the Inspector General. These shortages of critical positions strain the rest of the workforce and make it tougher on them as they care for our veterans. Reducing these vacancies must be a priority for the department so that dedicated providers like Gary have the people and other resources around them to deliver the consistent, high-quality care our veterans deserve.

“Recruiting providers is challenging for everyone in the health care industry, but I worry that VA is limited in its ability to compete with the private sector due to salary restrictions and bureaucratic hiring practices.

“For health care providers, VA does have authority to set pay based on market conditions in a specific area. One of the challenges, which we frequently see in rural areas, is that the qualified applicants are not in that market, and VA really needs to adjust the pay to attract qualified doctors and nurses from other areas of the country. I hope to hear more from our witnesses today on how VHA can accomplish that and what this committee can do to help.

“Additionally, we often hear from hiring managers that it takes too long to hire good people. VHA’s current hiring model for doctors and nurses allows for 34 days from closing a job announcement to issue a tentative offer of employment. It could take another 45 days from that initial offer to conduct the credentialing and privileging, background check, physical, and drug test before that new employee can actually start working. If another area hospital provides an offer sooner and has a quicker onboarding process, that doctor or nurse may not be able to wait for the VA process.

“I hope to hear more from our witnesses today on how this hiring model compares with practices in the private sector, including any additional requirements VHA faces. I also want to hear more about how VHA has been hiring during the pandemic. I understand that for the past three months, VHA alone has hired over 20,000 employees. That appears to be more than double the number hired in the first three months of this year.

“In our Budget hearing last month, Secretary Wilkie noted that many of these new employees were hired much more quickly than traditional processes allow for. I am very interested in what changes VHA has made during the pandemic and which of those changes can be used to improve the hiring process on a permanent basis.

“Thank you.”