

Inhofe SVAC testimony in support of Enhancing Veterans Care Act
Tuesday, July 11th, Russell 418

- I would like to address the Committee on some of the VA health clinic challenges we have had in my state of Oklahoma.
- We have had serious problems at both VA centers in Oklahoma – Muskogee and Oklahoma City.
- My office has investigated hundreds of inquiries from Oklahoma veterans who have been subjected to insufficient, and possibly negligent care, or denied access to rightfully earned benefits.
- We have been helped by Ralph Gigliotti (pronounced Gil-ought-ee), our VISN 19 director, who is outstanding.
- He has been very supportive of ensuring the changes that need to happen on the ground in Oklahoma actually take place.
- Both OK VA centers now have new directors, Wade Vlosich (like sausage) and Mark Morgan.
- Because of Gigliotti (pronounced Gil-ought-ee) and the new directors' leadership, the Oklahoma facilities are implementing new processes and procedures that will improve care.
- The OKC center has gone from a one star to a three star facility in the last year alone.
- It was only after I held the VA IG nomination on the Senate floor last year that the VA ensured us that they would send a third party to investigate these facilities.
- The VA contracted with the Joint Commission to do an investigation of Oklahoma's facilities in conjunction with the VA Inspector General.
- It's important we hold care providers accountable to the highest standards of excellence for our veterans.
- Having this outside entity come in and compare the VA facilities to private sector health care facilities is helping identify clear problems for the local and regional directors to go after and fix.

- A fresh set of eyes, from outside the VA, will enhance everyone's efforts to ensure our VA facilities are world class.
- This is not just a problem in Oklahoma.
- Across the nation, veterans have become all too familiar with the unsatisfactory care being provided through the VA health care system.
- Too often, internal VA reports and investigations do not match the facts on the ground, and the regional directors know this.
- As a result, many veterans and VA employees have lost faith in the agency and are not receiving the proper care they deserve.
- To address this I along with the junior Senator from Oklahoma, James Lankford, introduced S. 1266, the Enhancing Veteran Care Act, which provides permanent authority for VISN directors, like Ralph Gigliotti (pronounced Gil-ought-ee), and medical center directors to contract with outside entities to do these kinds of investigations.
- There is no better group to give this contracting authority to than the regional VA directors who know firsthand the issues their medical facilities face and are directly responsible for bringing about change in the midst of excessive bureaucracy.
- I believe this to be an important authority that needs to be explicitly provided to them, so that more of the VA health center problems, which we hear about far too often, can be fully addressed.
- Thank you for having me today and I encourage swift passage of this important legislation.