

Ranking Member Richard Burr

Thank you, Chairman Filner, Chairman Akaka and Ranking Member Buyer for convening this joint hearing on the legislative presentation of the Disabled American Veterans. It is a pleasure to sit with you on the dais this afternoon.

I am pleased to be here today and listen to the priorities of the DAV as we continue to set our legislative agendas for the first session of the 111th Congress.

The Disabled American Veterans represent all those who have sacrificed their health and well-being in pursuit of protecting the freedoms we enjoy. We shall not forget your contributions.

These joint hearings provide us with the opportunity to hear your concerns and listen to your ideas. Many of you traveled great distances to be here with us today. I welcome each and every one of you; your dedication to veterans' issues is an invaluable service to our country.

I would be remiss if I didn't also extend a warm welcome to my fellow North Carolinians. I spent the last week traveling across my home state talking to my constituents and was able to meet with many veterans and hear their concerns. I am glad to see that some of you were able to make the trip up here today to continue your noble work on behalf of North Carolina veterans and their survivors.

Commander Dempsey, it is also a pleasure to have you here this afternoon. Your lifelong commitment to disabled veterans is evident by your election as National Commander, and I look forward to working with you during your tenure to improve the lives of our nation's veterans.

Commander Dobmeier, I would also like to extend my warm wishes to you. As the DAV Auxiliary Commander, your role in 'building a better life for veterans' is a great benefit to our heroes from former conflicts and the current war on terror. I thank you and all of your members for your dedication to veterans.

Commander, one of DAV's highest priorities for this Congress is advanced appropriations. I am right there with you. As I have stated publicly and in Committee hearings, I want to ensure that politics-as-usual doesn't interfere with the funding of VA healthcare. That is why I was pleased to join Chairman Akaka as an original cosponsor of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act.

This bill will allow the Veterans' Health Administration to plan its budgets in two-year cycles through advanced appropriations. And it would make the budget requests from the Administration more transparent. I believe it is a step in the right direction to making sure our veterans get the health care they need and deserve.

Another priority for DAV is to work toward a more efficient and timely claims processing system. Again, I am fully committed to the same goal. It is simply unacceptable that many veterans wait in excess of 4 years to receive an answer about their disability compensation claims.

As I stated in a hearing on this very subject less than two weeks ago, I hope to work with the Chairman to see whether there is a short-term, targeted strategy that could help reduce the backlog of pending appeals. I also look forward to working with DAV to find common-sense solutions that will, in the long term, help improve the claims processing system for all service members and veterans seeking benefits from VA.

This Congress, I will also continue to work toward a more seamless transition from active military service to veteran status. Abraham Lincoln said it best, "I am greatly obliged to you, and to all who have come forward at the call of their country." I would like to thank all of you for your continued efforts on behalf of our nation's wounded heroes.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the Commander's testimony.

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