

Chairman Daniel K. Akaka

OPENING STATEMENT

Senator Daniel K. Akaka

Chairman

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

United States Senate

Hearing on Pending Benefits Legislation before the  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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Good morning and Aloha. Welcome everyone to the Committee's hearing on pending benefits legislation. We have a comprehensive agenda today and I will make my opening remarks quite brief so that we can get started.

The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the needs of veterans and their families to the forefront and, as a result, there are many bills on the agenda. While I am pleased that so many have taken an active interest in the well-being of our Nation's finest citizens, I realize that this has placed a burden on our witnesses and I thank all of you for your testimony.

My belief is that the Committee should look at all items except for those that have had no support in previous years. In light of the many bills pending before the Committee, we could have had multiple hearings. However, given the Committee's emphasis on oversight activity and the many demands on Members' time, I felt it better to start with only two legislative hearings, today's on benefits legislation and one in two weeks on health legislation. These will be followed by a mark up in June.

I note that five of the bills on the agenda are ones I introduced. Information on those bills as well as a description of the other measures are in my longer statement which is available on the table.

As is the case every Session, the biggest hurdle for implementation of these bills into law is cost. I am working to find appropriate offsets within the Committee's jurisdiction.

I thank the witnesses from VA and other organizations for coming today to share their views. Because the number of measures before us this morning is unusually large and a number of them have been added to the agenda only recently, witnesses may not have had an opportunity to review them and formulate positions. Therefore, the Committee will hold the record of this hearing open for two weeks so that witnesses can submit supplemental views on any legislative item. It is important that we have your input well in advance of our June mark up.

I look forward to hearing from each of you this morning.