

Larry Helm, President, Molokai Veterans Caring for Veterans

VA CARE IN HAWAII (MOLOKAI)

Written & Oral Testimony

By

Larry H. Helm

Mr. Larry Craig, Chairman  
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Daniel Akaka  
Ranking Chairman

Hearing: January 10, 2006, 10 a.m., at Cameron Center Auditorium, 95  
Mahalani Street, Wailuku, Maui, Hawaii

State of VA Care in Hawaii

Aloha Kakahiaka (Good Morning) to you and your staff. Welcome to Hawaii nei and to the island of Maui. My name is Larry Helm, a heavy combat Vietnam Veteran. I represent 345 Molokai Veterans from all wars and conflict. From the vision of Patsy Bird, the Molokai Veterans Caring for Veterans Center?Koa Kahiko (strong, wise, ancient warrior) formed four years ago mainly for Veterans to have a voice and address concerns on the island of Molokai.

Because we are an island in Maui County surrounded by water, there have been many challenges to get services for Molokai Veterans. Today the Veterans Administration is doing a lot more for the Molokai Veterans. I thank you and ask you to please continue. I'm sure that there are a lot of rural ?Molokais? throughout this country that face the challenges of caring for the veterans. Molokai has many combat Vietnam veterans that are finally getting help. The island has a population of 7,000 residents and has contributed to our country greatly. We have a memorial stone in the middle of town naming ten World War II, six Korean, and five Vietnam Veterans who lost their lives for this country.

There is a wall in Washington DC with over 58,000 names of my brothers and sisters killed in action in country in Vietnam but we do not have a wall for over 100,000 that prematurely died from wounds related to combat i.e. agent orange, chronic PTSD, physical wounds, etc. This issue has been sanitized. In the last year on Molokai, Koa Kahiko lost five Vietnam veterans. Eldridge Spencer, 56 years old, died three weeks ago from leukemia due to agent orange exposure. Three of the deceased veterans had just started to receive their service connected disability benefits. The Molokai Community has over 40 men/women who have served and are serving today in Afghanistan and Iraq.

I speak for past Veterans but especially for those veterans who will return from the Middle East to Molokai. I emphasize the importance of continuing and improving the mental and physical health-care they deserve. All service connected claims must be efficiently and hastily processed sooner not later.

The Molokai Veteran Community says "thank you?". The VA has certified Dr. Havelman, a resident of Molokai, to practice on Molokai along side the medical team from Maui.

I ask:

? to have more psychological help for veterans on Molokai. It takes six months to get an appointment. Dr. McNamara is the Mother Theresa for the veterans and her time is limited. We need more of her or hire two more Dr. McNamaras. Dr. Springer, the psychiatrist will start this month. Mahalo.

? to have inpatient nurse help for older Molokai veterans.

? for a mini honor guard burial service for service connected veterans. Every veteran deserves the honor.

? to not repeat the process that led to the loss of many Vietnam veteran lives who did not get psychological help because of PTSD (suicide, despondence, hopelessness, and deterioration of their body). In combat, one size does not fit all. Why would you want to revisit the studying of PTSD when the psychiatric community has studied this scientifically from all wars and has agreed that PTSD is a serious permanent disorder that affects many veterans. I hope the government does not water down the treatment for this mental disorder because of budget restraints; especially for the returning Veterans.

? To please continue providing Veteran organizations the opportunity to testify for veterans affairs. We heard Senator Buyer wanted to stop VFW, DMV, etc. from giving testimony. That is absolutely not acceptable.

I suggest:

? starting a national veteran low interest credit union and credit card service for connected veterans and other veterans. It could be a profitable and honorable thing to do for our veterans.

? that spouses of 100% service connected veterans qualify to receive their husband/wife veteran benefits 5 years rather than 10 years. Many veterans die prematurely and leave their spouse empty.

Mr. Larry Craig & Senator Daniel Akaka page 3

Mahalo for your time and the opportunity to testify here this morning and hope you consider all that I have said. In my opinion, Veterans are the soul of this country. The American people require that it be mandatory that Congress provide whatever budget is needed to care for Veterans. May Akua bless you and the United States of America.

Aloha, aloha no.

Larry Helm, Commander  
Molokai Veterans Caring for Veterans