

Ranking Member Richard Burr

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And welcome to all of our witnesses.

Let me begin by extending my gratitude to those here today who've come to help us understand how we can best support the families of our wounded warriors. Mrs. McMichael, I'm especially proud to see a fellow North Carolinian. Thank you for your willingness to share your family's story this morning. Mrs. McMichael, your perspective is one of a loving wife; we will also hear the perspective of two fathers. Your stories will help us understand that being a father, mother, husband, or wife, in addition to the primary caregiver to an injured servicemember, can be a challenge. It is also a critical need.

If there is a common theme that I see in the first panel's testimony today it's this: We can help families most by providing quick, hassle-free, and quality services to their loved ones. We're about to hear three different stories of how that didn't always happen; how there were breakdowns in the system; and how accountability was lacking in some key areas.

Congress has been wrestling with how best to ensure the "seamless transition" of the severely wounded from active duty to veteran status since the war began. Although I do believe we've made progress, the testimony today is a reminder that we still have more work to do. Families play such a critical role in the recovery process of our wounded warriors that it is important to provide them with proper support. As the old saying goes, "A family in harmony will prosper in everything." We should always remember that if a spouse or parent is feeling stressed, or if finances have caused a strain on the family, then that may negatively impact the recovery and rehabilitation of the servicemember.

I'd like to conclude with one final point. We spend a lot of resources trying to provide the highest level of care and benefits for our injured servicemembers, veterans, and their families. In fact, we're approaching almost \$150 billion in combined VA and Department of Defense programs to help them. I highlight this to suggest that the challenges facing many veterans and family members today have as much to do with confusing, bureaucratic programs operated by many different offices of the government, as they do with the lack of benefit programs or the lack of resources. I don't think there is one member of Congress who would hesitate to provide injured servicemembers and their families with the resources they need. But I expect, and I know these families expect, that these resources will be used effectively. We must do better.

Again, I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.