

Thank you Mr. Chairman

It's an honor for me to be on this Conference Committee.

I've never worked for the Veterans Administration but I fully understand the obligations that this nation has to those who have made tremendous sacrifices in defense of our freedom having served in both the Army and Marine Corps in our first Gulf War and in the Iraq War.

I am proud to be on the House Veterans' Committee and certainly to be on this Conference Committee. I have seen Republicans and Democrats come together in support of our veterans with literally no daylight between them and I think the American people ought to be proud of that as well.

I am shocked at what I have learned of the Veterans Administration; the systematic bureaucratic incompetence and a culture of corruption that seems to permeate the leadership of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

But I want to say something about the men and women who I believe are so dedicated to our veterans who work for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Many of them have had the courage to step forward and to be whistle blowers and we would not be here today if not for them. The leadership of the Veterans Administration has never identified any of the problems that are before us today.

It is the rank and file who are on the front line of the Veterans' Administration who have been the whistle blowers that have come forward because they want to honor our nations commitment to the men and women who have sacrificed so much in defense of our freedom. I think that the fundamental answer that I hope comes out of this conference committee is choice. Giving choice to our veterans: I know that we're defining that by distance from a Veterans facility as well as the length of wait times that one has to wait before they receive care. I think that will make not only the Veterans Health Administration better but I think it will also improve access and care to our nations veterans.

I'm reminded by a sign that was above the barracks door in my first assignment in the military in the U.S. Army, it said, "Lead, follow, or get out of the way". I would ask the President that at the end of the day no matter what we do, if there is not adequate leadership in the Department then we fundamentally will not change it. I think that somebody has to get in there as the new executive director for this agency and clean-house at the top and it's got to be "lead, follow or get out of the way".

With that Mr. Chairman, I yield back.