

Ranking Member Richard Burr

## Burr Opening Statement at Veterans' Committee Review of Appeals Process for Veterans' Disability Compensation

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to our witnesses. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you calling this important hearing to discuss how we can reduce the delays that too many of our nation's veterans and their families face in trying to access veterans' benefits.

For those who have served and sacrificed on behalf of our nation, they deserve prompt and just responses when they request benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. But, unfortunately, it can take months and even years for some veterans to get final answers to their requests. In fact, I hear from veterans in North Carolina about how long it takes to get a decision on their claims.

For starters, it takes an average of about 6 months for a VA regional office to make an initial decision on a claim for benefits. And that's just the beginning of the delays and frustrations if a veteran appeals that decision. That process could include reviews by the Board of Veterans' Appeals and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

I know the Board and Court have been making efforts to get decisions to veterans faster. Both were able to reduce their backlogs of appeals last year. I also recognize that there may be many reasons for why the appeals process takes so long, including errors in development of the case and steps Congress built into the process. But, whatever the reasons, it's clear that the appeals process takes far too long, and it's not acceptable.

After starting an appeal, it takes on average almost 1,100 days before a veteran will get a decision from the Board of Veterans' Appeals. If the veteran then appeals to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, he or she may wait 14 months for the Court to rule. In total, that's over four and a half years after the veteran first applies for benefits!

On top of that, veterans may face much longer delays if their cases have to be remanded or sent back by the Board or by the Court. And some have their appeals languish even longer because their cases are remanded on multiple occasions.

Given all this, it's understandable why many veterans, including veterans back in North Carolina, are extremely frustrated by this long appeals process. That's why it's so important that we figure out how we can help veterans get final decisions on their claims faster and without unnecessary frustration.

I appreciate the willingness of our witnesses, including Judge Kasold and Chairman Terry, to share with the Committee their views on how this process could be improved. I hope today we will have a constructive discussion that will serve as the foundation for much-needed and long-overdue improvements.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this important hearing. I look forward to working with you and others on the Committee to promote an appeals system that will serve our veterans better.

I thank the Chair.

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