

Senator Brown's Opening Statement
"The State of VA Health Care" Hearing
Thursday, May 15, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing and for your leadership of this Committee.

I want to thank the VSO leaders who are testifying today and Secretary Shinseki for your continued commitment to serving our nation's veterans.

We've heard some very serious allegations made against the VA.

And, like any allegation, we are investigating the claims so we can ensure VA healthcare is the best possible care for our veterans.

The Inspector General said it would take a few months, perhaps as late as August, to do a tough, fair, independent investigation.

But three months is too long when it comes to honoring our veterans.

That is why this hearing is so important.

VA and this committee are not sitting idly by until we hear from the IG.

The Secretary has taken these allegations very seriously.

He requested the IG investigation.

He removed employees accused from patient care responsibilities, placed several more on administrative leave, and ordered the Veterans Health Administration to complete a nation-wide access review.

And, this Committee is performing its constitutional duties that include rigorous oversight, of which this hearing is a part.

So many of us admire the work done by **Veterans Service Organizations** their commitment to veterans cannot be questioned.

I was extremely troubled when I heard the **allegations of wait lists leading to patient deaths** and of **employees allegedly cooking the books**.

These are serious claims.

If true, there must be reforms and serious consequences. And if true, this Committee will act swiftly and decisively.

But we should be cautious not paint the entire VA system with a broad brush – many VA workers serve our veterans honorably every day.

The Veterans Health Administration operates more than 1,700 sites, and conducts approximately 236,000 health care appointments each day. This amounts to approximately 85 million appointments each year.

We also know that Sec. Shinseki has a strong commitment to our veterans and our nation as well.

We are short on time, so I will conclude my remarks and look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

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