

**Rep. Brad Wenstrup (OH-02)**

**Opening Remarks – VA Conference Committee**

**Tuesday, June 24, 2014**

Thank you all for being here. Our world has a lot of things going on today, and so does our country, and the news cycle changes fast and I encourage everyone here to stay focused on this issue because it's a very important issue for our country. As a physician and a surgeon I practiced for 26 years before coming here last year. I've served in the Army and I continue to serve in the Reserves. I was in Iraq for a year as a surgeon at a combat support hospital in '05-'06. I've had the honor to serve our troops, not only in theater, but stateside, and also, like many docs' in the United States, I trained at a VA. Through those experiences, I've been able to see the inefficiency and the bureaucratic barriers that exist within the VA system, and we can't ignore them. You know, I've seen the difference between the VA system and the private system- that's been pointed out several times today. There are some issues that I think are treated much better within the walls of the VA because they're troop specific and I think they can be handled better by and large. In the VA, I know we have tremendous caregivers which we do. We have a lot of great caregivers, but what we're lacking in the VA is efficiency- and we're lacking senior administrators that have scruples and that truly care about their patients.

So before all this broke with Phoenix, there were several doctors from the House side, bi-partisan, that were seeking to take action about the inefficiencies of the VA because we know, because we come from private practice, what the difference is. And it took about a year to finally get a meeting and then all this broke. It's a shame that it's taken a lack of virtue from administrators, and the disregard for our veterans as patients to really bring this to the forefront because this inefficiency has been there for a long time.

In my own practice, two of our orthopedic surgeons, they go to the VA once or twice a month because they want to take care of veterans and they will tell you- "I can do two cases all day and in private practice I'm doing 8-10 of similar type procedures." As we move forward, we have to have the input of the practicing physicians. Not physicians who have never seen patients, not physicians who have been in academia or administration- they're not the ones who know how to get it done inside the clinics.

Our administrators, they have to know what it means to be a provider, and I will tell you that just building buildings does not provide access to care- that's what we have to address. When we have a system where our patient becomes a liability to the system, then that's a problem. Our patients need to be seen as an asset to the system, and that's what we

have to create in the VA. The stakes are too high. They're too high for those who have sacrificed so much for our country. These are people that, at a moment's notice, said "I will go and I will take action on behalf of our country"- now it's our turn to do that for them. They responded at a moment's notice and now we need to. Our work here will reflect who we are as a people and who we are as a nation.

I'm honored to serve on this committee. It's a very important task for all of us. Let's go to work and make our nation proud. Let's go to work and make our veterans proud. Let's go to work and make Abraham Lincoln proud, who tasked us with the responsibility to "care for him who shall have worn the battle." Thank you, and I yield back.