

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Jeff Miller
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives**

House and Senate VA Conference Committee Meeting

**June 24, 2014
2:00 P.M.
SVC 212-10**

Good afternoon.

Before we begin, I ask unanimous consent that all Conferee statements be added into the record and that all Conferees have five legislative days to revise and extend their remarks.

Without objection, so ordered.

Today, we meet to begin debate and negotiations regarding the House Amendment to the Senate Amendment to H.R. 3230, the Veteran Access to Care Act of 2014.

I will recognize myself first and then my co-chair, Chairman Sanders.

Following that, Conferees will be recognized in order of seniority alternating between the Senate and the House and the Majority and Minority in each body.

Each conferee will have five minutes – at a maximum – to make brief remarks.

An absent Conferee will be recognized in the next available slot from his or her chamber.

Though I recognize that we have a lot to discuss, I ask that everyone please be cognizant of the five minute time-limit so that each one of us has an opportunity to be heard in a timely manner.

This is the first time in fifteen years that the Veterans' Committees have engaged in a formal Member Conference.

I would like to acknowledge Senator Rockefeller and Representative Brown as the only two Members who participated in the 1999 Conference who are also a part of this historic Conference.

Thank you both for your continued service to our veterans.

It is also my honor to serve alongside Chairman Sanders and each of you as we work to address long-standing deficiencies at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that have negatively impacted the care provided to veteran patients.

By the Department's own admission, the VA health care system is suffering from widespread wrongdoing and systemic lack of integrity.

Veterans by the thousands have been left to wait weeks, months, and even years for the care they have earned and deserve.

Tragically – intolerably – some of those veterans died before they could receive the care they required.

For them, the work we begin today is too late.

But for those veterans still waiting, our work begins not a moment too soon.

The bureaucratic failures that brought us to this point are legion and can only be solved by meaningful reform enacted after close and careful consideration and face-to-face deliberation by both bodies.

The work done by the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee's is historically bipartisan and I expect the work we begin today to be the same.

Though we have differences that will need to be addressed as we move forward, all of us share the same primary goals.

First, to ensure our nation's veterans have timely access to high-quality health care.

Second, to ensure that VA leaders and employees are held accountable for actions that harm veteran patients.

The work we do in this Committee will impact the way in which this country's second largest bureaucracy operates and the manner in which veterans throughout the country receive needed care for years to come.

There is no doubt that hard work and tough decisions await us in the days ahead.

However, those of us gathered around this dais bring years of diverse experience in government, business, law, medicine, and a variety of other disciplines.

Some of us are healthcare providers.

Several are veterans, including one - Senator McCain - whose sacrifice to our country few of us can fathom.

All of us share a passion for making the VA a better place, a better service.

Together, we will more than meet the challenge ahead of us.

We will be responsive to the needs of both our nation's veterans and her taxpayers.

And, we will live up to the example set by those who wear her uniform.

I am committed to nothing less.

Again, I would like to thank Senator Sanders, Senator Burr, Ranking Member Michaud, and each one of our esteemed conferees for the work done so far and the work still to come.

I look forward to hearing your comments today and as we move forward.