

Senator Sherrod Brown

Remarks to the Senate Joint Hearing of the Senate Armed Services and Veterans Affairs
Committee

April 12, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The purpose of today's hearing is to learn more about the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs disability rating systems and the transition of service members from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veterans Affairs. This system must be seamless, efficient and beneficiary-focused. We can do better and we must.

In a speech to graduates at the US Naval Academy in May of 2001, the President said "I'm committed to building a future force that is defined less by size and more by mobility and swiftness".

Here we are, six years later, and we have an Administration that is stringing injured troops along in the hopes of returning them to battle. Further, we are sending troops to Iraq without the protection they need and without adequate training and rest between deployments.

In that same speech, the President said, "We must build forces that draw upon revolutionary advances in the technology of war."

Now that we are at war, we need to build institutions that draw upon the technology of efficient systems to provide the best care possible for our troops.

If we can develop the most advanced military in the world, certainly we can develop systems that end the lengthy delays in DoD processing, effectively shepherd our soldiers through the military hospital system and dispense with VA's daunting claims backlog.

Lives are put on hold while DoD waits. Children grow and opportunities are missed. And, should a soldier enter the VA after long delays at DoD, he or she is further behind in the claims queue than those who transitioned more quickly.

My home state of Ohio has over 5,000 men and women serving in Iraq today. I receive notices regularly about soldiers from Ohio receiving care after being wounded in combat.

Recently, I met with wounded soldiers from Toledo and Maumee. These soldiers told me they were getting great care and that the doctors and nurses were amazing. Like the military hospital system, the VA, in many ways, is the best health care provider in the world.

Our military and VA hospitals do amazing work and we must ensure that lapses like those we saw at Walter Reed never happen again.

The biggest hurdle in doing this is the Administration's failure to include spending associated with caring for our wounded as a cost of this war.

The price tag on our Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan must include the cost that we will incur today and for the next 50 years caring for today's soldier and tomorrow's veteran.

The delays in rating wounded servicemen and service women, the horror stories coming out of Walter Reed, the embarrassing and disgraceful backlog and wait times within DoD and the VA for care and benefits, the lack of a seamless transition between DoD and the VA, as well as the woefully underfunded Administration budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs are shameful.

We all must rally around our troops. Not with photo ops and bravado, but with the resources our men and women in uniform need when they are in battle and when they come home. They have earned it and they deserve it.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.