

Major General Robert G. F. Lee, Adjutant General, Department of Defense

Statement of
Major General Robert G. F. Lee
Adjutant General, Department of Defense,
State of Hawaii
Before the
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
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Chairman Akaka and members of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am Major General Robert G. F. Lee, the Adjutant General for the State of Hawaii.

I am submitting my testimony to address health care and benefits for the veterans on Maui. We strongly support a proposal of consolidating veteran services at a single location on Maui.

Currently, the Maui VA clinic is classified as "sub-standard" and need to be relocated within eighteen months. The lease for the Maui VA Counseling Center located in Wailuku will expire in twenty-four months. Located approximately a mile away from the VA clinic is the State Office of Veterans' Services. The lack of parking at these facilities has caused much frustration and discouragement for our veterans'. s responsible for the welfare of our veterans and their families. They also act as an intermediary between our veterans and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Hawaii veterans make up more than ten percent of our total population. The majority of them – about 72% - live on the island of Oahu. About 13% live on the island of Hawaii, 10% are on one of the three islands that comprise Maui County, and 5% live on the island of Kauai. However, our veteran population continues to grow as Hawaii continues to support our nation's war on terrorism. Since September 11, 2001, call to active duty have involved nine out of every ten Hawaii Army National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers. They have served honorably in Iraq Afghanistan, and other locations; and have returned to Hawaii after their 12-15 month deployments.

Members of the Hawaii Air National Guard have supported and continues to support Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

It is important that these veterans return to their communities in good health. The Office of Veterans' Services partners with the Veterans' Administration here during the soldier's demobilization process. This partnership works to ensure that no veteran or no benefit is forgotten.

The United States government has an obligation to our military members from enlistment, through their years of service, and to veterans' benefits. We must ensure that all veterans receive all entitled benefits now and tin the years to come.

The National Guard Bureau recently authorized the Army and Air National Guard to release medical records to the Department of Veterans' Affairs without the veteran's signature. This new procedure speeds the Department of Veterans' Affairs adjudication of veterans' claims and provides medical care to National Guard members.

I come to you with two concerns. First and most important is Veterans' Affair services to all our veterans, especially on the neighbor islands and our Pacific Islander veterans form Tinian,

Rota, and Saipan. In July 2007, a VA clinic opened in American Samoa that supports our veterans there. However, veterans from other Pacific islands must pay the high cost of airline and hotel accommodations to receive follow-on medical treatment. In Hawaii, a similar situation occurs when a neighbor island veteran must come to Tripler Army Medical Center/Matsunaga VA Hospital in Honolulu for treatment. We must find a solution to this situation. One thought would be to establish a partnership between the Department of Veterans' Affairs and existing medical/health care facilities on the neighbor islands to provide medical treatment for our veterans.

Second concern is the staffing at VA hospitals. For example, the Post Deployment Health Reassessment Program (PDHRA) requires an initial appointment with 30 days for VA registration.

On average, the VA hospital schedules initial appointments as much as 90 to 120 days from the registration date. Our local VA hospital staff has been doing their best to provide services to all of our veterans. They have stretched their limited health care provider resources to support their mission requirements to all veterans in the Pacific Basin.

In closing, I want to thank the committee for their continuing support of our veterans. Thank you for coming to Hawaii to conduct these hearings. Are there any questions?