

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

Joint Hearing on the Legislative Presentation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars

(VFW)

March 3, 2015

Good morning and thank you.

It is an honor and a privilege for me to be here with Chairman Isakson and Ranking Members Blumenthal and Brown to welcome you all to today's joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees to receive the legislative presentation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW).

Thank you all for your brave and honorable service to our nation – service that continues through your work with the VFW and your attendance here this morning.

I want to extend a special welcome to Commander-in-Chief John Stroud.

Sir, thank you for your years of service, for your leadership within the VFW, and for being here today to share your wisdom with all of us.

I also want to welcome the National President of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary, Ms. Ann Panteleakos.

Ma'am, thank you for being here and for all of the good work that the Auxiliary does for our veterans and their families.

I would also like to recognize the VFW members from my home state of Florida who are in our audience today.

Would you please stand or raise your hand and be recognized?

Thank you all for leaving Florida's sunny shores to spend this gray day in Washington with us and for representing the Sunshine state so well.

I am grateful not only to have you all here this morning but also for the work VFW does across this country every day in service to our veterans and their families.

I am also grateful for the hard work VFW does right here in our nation's Capitol.

During last year's unprecedented access and accountability scandal, VFW's invaluable advice and support helped us to craft and pass the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, which paved the way to increasing access to care for veterans and increasing accountability for VA bureaucrats who fail to serve them well.

Since that law was passed, VFW's important work has not abated.

Through the recent Veterans Choice program initial report and other activities, VFW's insights and frontline knowledge of the VA health care system continue to assist veterans struggling to receive VA care in a timely manner and inform the Committee where improvements are still needed.

I applaud these persistent efforts and look forward to seeing the results of the next VFW report on the state of VA health care and implementation of the Choice program, which I understand will be released in April.

However, our work together has just begun.

Commander-in-Chief Stroud, I am appalled by the story you share in your testimony about a veteran with cancer who was asked by VA to travel four hours every day to receive chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

That is simply unacceptable, under any circumstances, but it is especially unacceptable given the significant resources and the many non-VA care authorities that are at VA's disposal.

Stories like that veteran's and the others that I hear every day from veterans who deserve better from the government they fought to protect exemplify just how critical the work of the VFW is and will continue to be as we move forward in instilling much-needed reform and a culture of accountability and service to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I am confident that, working together with the nearly 1.9 million members of the VFW and your Auxiliaries, there is no challenge we can't meet on behalf of our veterans.

Thank you all once again.

I look forward to hearing your testimony today, Commander-in-Chief Stroud.