

Ranking Member Richard Burr

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Good morning, Chairman Akaka, Chairman Filner, and Ranking Member Buyer. I want to thank my colleagues for convening this joint hearing. I also want to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses this morning.

I am pleased to be here to listen to your legislative priorities. Many of you have traveled long distances to be here with us today, and this underscores your commitment to our nation's veterans and their families.

I often hear from VSOs from North Carolina about the challenges veterans face at home. Your testimony today will complement the local perspectives my colleagues and I hear so often during our travels in our home states. Together, these local and broader views will help guide our work in Congress to ensure we are meeting the needs of veterans and their loved ones across our nation.

I would be remiss if I didn't also extend a warm welcome to my fellow North Carolinians here with us today. I always value hearing your concerns, and I thank you for your work on behalf of veterans.

I share your commitment to our nation's veterans, and I look forward to working with each of your organizations. Our nation's veterans have sacrificed greatly for our freedom. Caring for "him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan" is not a partisan issue, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on both sides of aisle to fulfill this promise.

Looking through the testimony I see some common themes.

First, I could not agree more that we must provide VA with a timely, predictable, and sufficient budget. It is simply unacceptable that too often funding for VA health care has fallen victim to "politics as usual." Our veterans deserve better.

I'm pleased to be an original cosponsor of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act. Not only will this bill allow the Veteran's Health Administration to plan its budget in two-year cycles through advanced appropriations, it will also lend new transparency to the budget process.

Improving the quality and timeliness of the disability claims process is another common theme. I am fully committed to this goal, and I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about how we can address the unacceptably long delays that veterans are facing.

Ensuring that our nation's servicemembers experience a seamless transition from active duty to civilian status is another shared goal. I look forward to working with my colleagues this Congress to address the challenges that remain in ensuring a continuum of quality care for our nation's wounded heroes.

I'm confident that we can come together to find common-sense and innovative solutions to the challenges facing our nation's veterans and their loved ones.

Thank you again to our witnesses for sharing your thoughts and time with us. I'm looking forward to hear your testimony and to learn how we can work together on behalf of our nation's veterans and their loved ones this Congress.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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