

**STATEMENT OF**  
**REPRESENTATIVE MARK TAKANO**  
**CALIFORNIA'S 39<sup>th</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT**  
**RANKING MEMBER, HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE**  
**“MEMBER DAY”**  
**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025 — 10:00AM**

Mr. Chairman and Ms. Ranking Member, Members of the Committee on Agriculture, thank you for hosting this Member Day hearing and providing me the opportunity to testify before you. Today, I am appearing as the Representative of California's 39<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, but also as the Ranking Member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

As we sit here, we must acknowledge that veterans, their families, and caregivers across the country are facing higher costs of living, leading to greater risks of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and other negative outcomes. Veterans are not immune to the economic realities facing the general population. When it is too expensive to rent a house, the cost of health insurance is rising, and food prices are increasing, VA programs can only mitigate, not shield veterans from, the impacts of larger economic trends.

I am incredibly frustrated that this Congress and this Committee delivered devastating cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) earlier this year through the budget reconciliation process. Under the “Big Beautiful Bill”, veterans and those experiencing homelessness will now be subject to work requirements.

When you hear “work requirements,” you should know that means “paperwork requirements.” Let’s be clear about what these so-called “work requirements” actually do. They don’t help people find jobs or create employment opportunities. They just cut people off from food. And when you take away veterans’ food assistance, you are forcing them to choose between keeping a roof over their heads, keeping the lights on, or keeping food on the table.

My constituents know all too well the impact of SNAP. Over 35,000 households and nearly 116,000 people in my district rely on these funds to keep food on the table, and these paperwork requirements threaten their benefits as they try to make ends meet.

One constituent recently reached out to say the following:

“I’m a low-income senior citizen. I only receive 40 dollars from the SNAP program, but it helps to buy bottled water. Where I live, the water out of the faucet smells and tastes terrible. I barely make it each month; after my rent and bills are paid, I use all the rest of my money on food, and usually by the end of the month I am out of food. It is very distressing to think about them cutting off the 40 dollars I get. It’s like cutting off my water supply and taking 40 dollars of food away from me each month. I know that is not much to a lot of people, but it is to me.”

You must understand that each dollar cut from SNAP is a missed meal for an American that needed our help.

Mr. Chairman, during your Committee’s mark-up of the reconciliation package, you stated, “Our veterans are exempt from the SNAP work requirement, which is the law … and we’re not changing it.” Yet here we are.

I ask you to hold joint hearings with the VA Committee so that you can hear directly from servicemembers, veterans, and their families regarding the impact hunger is having on their lives. Today, we see heavy use of food pantries at VA facilities, on military bases, and in military communities across the country. We know the need is there. Kicking people off SNAP doesn't reduce poverty — it exacerbates it. As the wealthiest country on earth, we have no excuse to tolerate this.

Our two Committees should be working to strengthen the social safety net for our veterans. We should be celebrating, protecting, and improving America's most effective basic needs food assistance program that has helped countless veterans and their families get through hard times, not gutting SNAP at a time when Americans are struggling with the high cost of food.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight over 300,000 veteran farmers, who account for about 9 percent of the agricultural producers in the United States. From Census data, we know that veteran farmers tend to be older, run smaller farms, and harvest a smaller total value from their crops than the average producer. They are not running large corporate farms, but smaller operations with thinner margins, and I am concerned about the damage the Trump Tariffs are doing to their livelihoods.

While veteran farmers are not specifically identified in the data set, we know that farm bankruptcies were up 57 percent year over year for the first half of 2025. With 13 percent of veteran farmers growing oilseeds and grains, and 30 percent raising cattle or dairy, I am concerned about the impacts of Trump's trade war on soybean producers and Trump's tweets on cattle markets. Knowing that veteran producers tend to run smaller farms with thinner margins, I worry that veterans may be overrepresented in this growing number of bankruptcies. With that, I

am not confident that USDA and the VA are postured to help these veterans and their families as they face bankruptcies and subsequent foreclosures.

In the veteran space, we have seen time and time again that early intervention and prevention is much more cost effective than addressing needs in crisis. It holds true for housing, it holds true for hunger, it holds true for employment, and it holds true for mental health. Every dollar you are taking away from hungry veterans through SNAP cuts, or every dollar a veteran farmer loses due to Trump's Trade War, we are going to have to spend two, three, or ten times over at VA to provide support for veterans, their families, and their survivors.

VA's resources are already strained and stretched thin. Just last week, our Committee heard a proposal from Chairman Bost and Representative Barrett to cut from one set of disabled veterans' benefits to pay for other disabled veteran and survivor benefits. I clearly oppose any such measure, and I hope every single one of our colleagues will as well, but you can take from their willingness to even discuss something so extreme that our Committee is not funded to construct a social safety net specific to veterans. We must address the issues holistically for all Americans.

Healthcare is no different. In rural California, in Indian Country, and across America, we have lost more and more doctors, nurses, and hospitals. As we stare down the looming impacts of over \$1 trillion in Medicaid cuts and the ripping away of ACA tax credits, the loss of healthcare workers and hospitals in rural areas will only get worse, and more veterans will turn to VA and the Indian Health Service for care. But accessing care is difficult for rural veterans, their families, and veteran farmers because they must travel long distances to medical facilities, and their options for care in their community shrink as the number of rural healthcare professionals shrinks. This increases their time away from work, results in deferred medical

care, and reduces preventive care, which all impacts rural veterans and veteran farmers' physical health. Their physical health is inextricably tied to their economic outlook and, in turn, their mental health. Again, we here in Congress cannot gut essential social safety net programs for the general population and not expect an impact on our veterans.

My predecessor as Ranking Member on the VA Committee also served as a distinguished Member of your panel. Governor Walz constantly reminded us that we show our true priorities through how we spend the VA budget and the Committee's time. I'm sure he said the same thing to you all in this very room as well.

He was right. And I challenge every Member of this Committee to put their money where their mouth is. I'm sure every one of us will give eloquent speeches on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. I'm sure we will all thank our military members for their service. I'm sure we will all cheer at the military flyover at the next sporting event we attend. But will this Committee vote to restore exemptions to work requirements for veterans and those experiencing homelessness? Will this Committee vote to prevent a billion-dollar bailout of Argentina while veteran farmers right here in the United States are on the brink of bankruptcy? Will this Committee rein in an out-of-control executive that is unilaterally raising taxes on Americans and crushing farmers with poorly thought-out tariffs?

Or will this Congress put party over country by rubber stamping continued cuts that undermine rural healthcare, bankrupt veteran farmers, and cause veterans, their families, and their survivors to go hungry?

We here in Congress must do better, and Mr. Chairman, I ask you to lead us in that with the power of your gavel.