

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE MIKE COFFMAN (CO-06)
BEFORE THE FULL COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

October 12, 2017

Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin by thanking you for including my bill in today's legislative hearing and thank the witnesses for their testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I think we can all agree that the VA's sole mission is to provide services to our nation's veterans.

The maintenance of a 5-star, 24-room boutique hotel, restaurant, and club in downtown Paris, France is clearly not included in that mission.

Therefore, in an effort to get the VA out of the overseas hotel business and focused on its core competencies, I introduced H.R. 2773, the Sell Excess Luxury Lodgings (SELL) Act, to authorize the sale of this hotel – "Pershing Hall."

Pershing Hall is a building originally procured by the American Legion to serve as a memorial to our "Doughboys," who served in France during World War I. The building was transferred to the VA in 1991, and in 1998, the VA leased Pershing Hall for a 99-year period to a French firm that redeveloped the property as a luxury hotel.

In recognition of the historic aspects of Pershing Hall, H.R. 2773 requires the preservation of architectural details of the exterior and interior of the structure, and requires all property of General Pershing and the American Expeditionary Forces in France during World War I to be transferred to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

H.R. 2773 also appropriately requires the transfer of sale proceeds to the American Battle Monuments Commission for the maintenance of cemeteries, monuments, and memorials dedicated to our men and women in uniform.

Mr. Chairman, today you will hear the concern that the fair market value will not represent the true value of the property because it is encumbered by the VA's lease. Unfortunately, the reality is that the VA negotiated a bad, long-term deal that significantly decreased the market value of the property. Even more of a reason to get the VA out of the hotel business.

To address this concern, I plan to amend my legislation to require a condition of sale be the appraised value of the property.

While Pershing Hall is probably a terrific hotel, it makes no sense that the VA keeps a luxury hotel in Paris on its books. The VA needs to focus its time and resources on its core mission: taking care of our nation's veterans.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to testify today on behalf of this legislation and I yield back the remainder of my time.