

MR. SABLAN:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on Section 213 which would require the VA to report on the services it provides to the veterans living in the U.S. territories of the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The VA would also provide an assessment of its ability to provide hospital care, medical, mental health, and geriatric services. Additionally the VA would study the feasibility of establishing a VA medical clinic in the Northern Marianas, the only territory without full-time VA medical or mental health professionals to serve our veterans. While other territories have a VA clinic, staffing shortages, facilities and equipment issues have diminished available services for veterans living in those areas.

The language is not new. I introduced it as an amendment to *H.R. 4243, the VA Asset and Infrastructure Review Act of 2017*, and Ms. Gonzalez-Colon offered the amendment to *H.R. 4242, the VA Care in the Community Act*. I appreciate the members agreeing to include the language in both bills.

This language in H.R. 5674 will provide the committee with the information necessary to better understand the challenges of delivering care to veterans in the territories, and to direct the resources needed for VA to provide the quality care that veterans were promised, and have earned, on the islands they call home.

Accessing care where they live has become especially important to veterans in the Northern Marianas. United Airlines recently announced that service between Saipan and Guam will be reduced from five daily flights to one flight per day. Flights between Rota and Guam will be eliminated entirely. This means Saipan and Tinian veterans referred to Guam for care will be forced to stay at least one night to catch the next flight home. Rota veterans may have to spend one night on Saipan to make the Guam flight then stay overnight on Guam for the return flight. This also assumes there is space on the daily flights. Regardless, this increases costs of care for the VA and the veteran.

Veterans in the territories deserve better. The VA report resulting from my language will provide the data to make that happen.

My thanks to Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz for supporting the inclusion of my language in the bill.