

Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Waltz:

Thank you for hosting the first-ever Member Day in the House Veterans Affairs Committee. I am grateful for your steadfast efforts in advancing much-needed reforms to the Department of Veterans Affairs. I remain committed to yours and President Trump's mission to provide quality care and service to our nation's heroes.

Unfortunately, despite Congress and the Administration's proactive steps to bring positive changes to the VA – in Arizona – we are still seeing some of the same problems we faced throughout the last administration. It is my hope that we can work together to change the status quo and ensure the highest level of care for our constituents.

Today, I want to bring to your attention a couple of issues facing my constituents:

First, the lack of clear criteria for approving benefits claims at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Regional Office remains burdensome. My constituents have expressed frustration in getting their claims processed and approved, and fail to understand the reasoning behind frequent roadblocks and denials.

To my understanding, the “Benefit of the Doubt Rule” ensures that the Secretary rule in favor of the veteran “when there is an approximate balance of positive and negative evidence regarding any issue material to the determination of a matter.”

However, interaction with constituents has left me wondering if the practical standard when reviewing evidence is the reverse. I have heard from veterans around the country that they do not have as many issues in getting their benefits claims approved by their respective regional offices.

My office is working on a particular case where a veteran has a strong preponderance of evidence supporting his claims. And yet, the Phoenix regional office is turning to a small piece of contradicting evidence to leverage their decision.

Additionally, the Phoenix VA has informed me that there is no specific timeline for a regional office to address a remanded case from an appeals judge. This increases the possibility of years of bureaucratic burdens and backlog – meanwhile our veterans remain uncertain on the status of his or her benefits claims.

And although we've made significant progress with the signing of the Appeals Modernization Act and our vote today to prove more CHOICE for our veterans, these are some examples that continue to reflect the growing frustration among Arizona's veteran community.

Mr. Roe, Mr. Waltz, as you continue your honorable work on behalf of our constituents, I urge the committee to address the bureaucratic hurdles in the Veterans Benefits Administration. The VA is facing a myriad of persistent problems, and these are some that I believe need to be addressed as soon as possible.

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your hard work, and for allowing us to speak before you today. I yield back.