

Rep. David Rouzer (NC-07)
Veterans Affairs Member Day

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of this distinguished committee for your work to bring forward solutions to strengthen care and resources for our nation's heroes. I am particularly grateful for your willingness to allow members who do not serve on this committee the opportunity to raise issues and share concerns that we hear from veterans back home.

The great state of North Carolina has a long, rich tradition of military service and we are blessed to have a large community of veterans in the 7th Congressional District, which I have the honor to serve and represent.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to bring the Committee's attention to a bill I recently introduced to help veterans restore their credit score when it has been degraded because the VA failed to pay an outside provider.

After hearing from multiple veterans in the 7th District, I was made aware of this credit issue. I might add that my office has helped facilitate hundreds of payments to outside providers by intervening with the VA. And the unfortunate reality is that there are many, many veterans across my district, state and our country that have had their credit destroyed, through no fault of their own, as a result of mismanagement and delays at the VA.

This is simply unacceptable.

H.R. 5500, the Veterans Credit Protection Act of 2018, if enacted into law, will address the backlog of payments, restore faith in the VA, and provide veterans the help they need to restore their credit when they have been the casualty of mismanagement and late payments, and in many cases, no payment made by the VA to the outside providers of their care.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of this bill as soon as possible so that veterans will no longer have to worry about their credit because of the VA's failure to pay their claims.

I also wanted to take a moment to raise an ongoing issue that occurred at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina in the hopes that this Committee can use its influence to provide relief to veterans across our nation who have been impacted by this issue.

As you may know, the water at Camp Lejeune was contaminated from 1953 to 1987, leaving hundreds of thousands of veterans at risk for a host of medical ailments and conditions – such as adult leukemia, aplastic anemia, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Parkinson's disease. Unfortunately, the conditions I just listed are the only ones that are covered by the VA as presumptive service connected. There are nearly half a dozen more that remain off the list – and, therefore, veterans have to go through an extensive process to prove exposure to these contaminants caused their condition. Currently, the evidentiary burden the VA requires for

these nonpresumptive exposure claims is significantly greater than the standard used for Agent Orange or any other exposure claims.

Just this past March, the VA began accepting claims related to the water contamination. According to the VA, it will pay out about \$2.2 billion in benefits by 2022.

While that's a step in the right direction, but there is more work that needs to be done to ensure that all veterans (and civilians) experiencing medical ailments as a result of this contamination are provided the best quality care and the benefit coverage they deserve. I urge the Committee to push the VA to rectify this wrong.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the opportunity to testify today on these two very important issues.