

House Veterans Affairs Committee
Representative Brad Schneider
Member Day Testimony
5-16-18

Thank you Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz for this opportunity to share with the House Veteran Affairs Committee some key priorities from Illinois's Tenth Congressional District.

I greatly respect and appreciate your work on this committee on behalf of our nation's veterans and hope your bipartisan work continues.

My district is the proud home to many military families, active duty, reservists and veterans. As well, Naval Station Great Lakes and the Lovell Federal Health Care Center are located in North Chicago, in the heart of the 10th district. I commend Lovell for the resources and services they provide to our nation's veterans. VA hospitals must be held to the highest standard and I look forward to continuing my partnership with the team at Lovell to ensure IL-10 veterans are properly taken care of.

First, I'd like to address the Veterans Choice program, which has enabled many veterans to receive care from community providers. While many veterans in my congressional district have benefited from this program, I have also heard about serious concerns and modifications that should be made. I understand your committee recently marked up and reported out the VA Mission Act, which among its provisions, addresses community care and the Choice program. I hope the House, as well as this Congress and Administration, can come together to improve this program so veterans can access the care they need in a timely manner. We owe our veterans this simple act.

Another issue I have increasingly heard more recently is the growing impact of environmental exposure experienced by our nation's veterans. This is not a new issue to the VA – we have seen the seriousness of illness linked to water contamination at bases such as Camp Lejeune, exposure to Agent Orange, and most recently, burn pits and other environmental toxins. I am concerned by previous VA action addressing hazardous exposure and want to make sure we are not only taking proper care of our veterans, but doing so in a timely manner, frankly, before it's too late.

Taking care of our veterans does not only mean health services, it also includes helping them transition back into communities, making it possible to attend college, and helping with employment. One of the first foundational requirements for successful transition is having a roof over one's head and that is why I have introduced legislation to help veterans by creating innovative programs to reduce the prevalence of homelessness. I was pleased to see earlier this year that the annual point-in-time count of homeless veterans for 2017 was 40,056 – this is a significant reduction from 73,367 in 2009. However, we need to continue to work to bring this

number zero. I hope the committee will consider my legislation to ensure all veterans have a warm bed to come home to and a secure roof over their head.

I also serve on the Democratic Caucus Task Force on Reinvesting in Our Returning Heroes where I am focused on veteran employment. Our veterans served us bravely overseas and have acquired many applied skills that will greatly enhance our civilian workforce and contribute to our economic prosperity.

I have introduced legislation to help veterans who may learn better from hands-on experience than in a classroom. My bill will enable veterans to receive their post 9-11 GI Bill benefits as a stipend while participating in qualified internships, not just structured school curricula. This would not only help employers looking for qualified applicants, but give veterans the hands-on experience they need to transition to the civilian workforce. I have also introduced legislation to authorize a Small Business Administration program to provide training to transitioning service members and veterans looking to start their own business. We owe it to our veterans to ensure they can succeed upon their arrival home.

I thank you for your time today and for your service to our nation and appreciate you allowing me to speak on priorities from Illinois's Tenth Congressional District.