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Thank you, Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, and the other members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee for hosting this Member Day hearing. I am proud of the bipartisan work that this committee consistently achieves. As I am sure many other members will acknowledge today, there are few issues nowadays that elicit such support regardless of party other than veterans.

I raised this issue with House Armed Services during their Member Day hearing, and I think it's appropriate for here too. Congress needs to do more to support our veterans who have suffered from toxic exposure. We have done some tremendous work to address this issue piecemeal, like our efforts on Blue Water Navy. But it's past time for a comprehensive reform package that addresses outstanding issues from Vietnam and Desert Storm while getting ahead of issues we are seeing, like burn pits, from Iraq, Afghanistan, and beyond. It was heartbreaking to see how this nation treated our Vietnam-era veterans as they suffered the effects from their exposures. Congress must not allow that to happen to this new generation of veterans as well. I'll do whatever I can to support such an effort and look forward to seeing what the committee puts forward.

The VA Mission Act was a tremendous opportunity to streamline how veterans received care, but the pandemic has shown us that there is still more work to be done on this issue. Over the past year, I have heard from a few of my constituents frustrated with their ability to get care. COVID has severely impacted the medical community but that still leaves my constituents upset when VA denies their requests for community care or the approval process takes over a month. My district is very rural, just like many on the committee, and these delays and denials severely impact lives. Let us use this opportunity that COVID has provided to make necessary adjustments to the MISSION Act and perfect how veterans can access care.

Another delay issue that I want to address with the committees is the long delays for processing pension claims at the VA. My constituents have worked diligently with the VA and my district staff in good faith. But we are seeing delays that take over a year to process, which forces them to have to resubmit financial records after they expire due to how long processing is taking. Processing has always been something that VA has struggled to achieve and made worse over the past year. I've joined efforts with many of my colleagues during the COVID-19 pandemic to address delayed processing. Now that things are starting to return to some sense of normal, I would like to work with the committee to find ways that speed up VA's capabilities to process these requests in a timely manner.

Lastly, I want to applaud the work that the committee has done during this difficult time to be advocates for veterans during a very difficult time. The work you all have done to assist those affected by COVID has not gone unnoticed with my constituents. Thank you again for this opportunity to talk about issues affecting my district and I look forward to working with you all to support the men and women who bravely served their country.

Sincerely,



KURT SCHRADER
Member of Congress