

## **Congressman Warren Davidson**

### **House Veterans Affairs Committee Member Day Testimony**

**May 26, 2021**

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As a former Army Ranger and member of the West Point Board of Visitors, I appreciate the opportunity to highlight issues facing our nation's veterans. Thank you, Chairman Takano, and Ranking Member Bost, for hosting Member Day and making the committee available to hear comments from your colleagues.

#### H.R. 3030, the Lead by Example Act of 2021:

“No veteran should go without quality health care after the sacrifices they have made for our country.”

“It's a crime the way our veterans are so often treated by the Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.).”

“We are morally bankrupt as a nation if we cannot care for our veterans.”

These are things that we all have heard elected officials say. At this point, they have become platitudes. If we polled Congress, few, if any, would disagree with these statements. Yet despite this rhetorical consensus on providing care for our veterans, V.A. care has not improved to an acceptable level. Over the years, Congress has created different programs that allow veterans to seek care outside of V.A. hospitals. However, veterans are still dying while they wait for care, getting shuffled around and lost in the bureaucracy.

If there is such broad support to fix the V.A., why do these problems persist? There are many contributing reasons. Chief among them: the V.A.—and their special interest enablers—have not been held accountable despite congressional reforms.

We think it's time for Congress to put their money where their mouth is. Hence, I have recently reintroduced the Lead By Example Act (H.R.3030). This legislation would do one simple thing: make it so that members of Congress and their staff can only receive healthcare from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The rhetoric of many Members of Congress suggests they are ready to fix the V.A. But when push comes to shove, knowing of the continued stories of access problems, are they prepared to place themselves under V.A. care? In an ideal world, our veterans would be receiving such high-quality care that members would want to get on the system. But right now, we have it backward.

#### Backlog at the National Personnel Records Center:

Since March 2020, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has been closed or operating at limited capacity. The backlog of requests currently stands at nearly 500,000, affecting thousands of veterans across the country, including in Ohio. Despite an unprecedented level of cooperation between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the NPRC, there is still no plan to fully staff the facility. At the current rate, it will take two years to address this backlog. This is unacceptable.

In April, I traveled to the NPRC facility in St. Louis and met with Director Scott Levins. After this visit, my office sent a bipartisan letter with Representative Ross and 185 of our colleagues to President Biden and Archivist Ferriero, outlining backlog issues at the NPRC. I

want to thank Ranking Member Bost and numerous members of this committee for joining this letter, particularly Representative Bergman, Representative Brownley, Representative Cawthorn, Representative Luria, Representative Moore, Representative Murphy, Representative Rosendale, and Representative Roy.

Two years is too long to wait. Prior to the pandemic these requests took an average of ten days to process. In some cases, families have had to bury their loved ones without military honors. Others are waiting for medical care or emergency housing. We need to keep our promises and find a real solution. We owe it to our nation's heroes. I am hopeful that this committee will take a leading role to fix this unacceptable situation for our nation's veterans.