

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

MEMBER DAY WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR KIM SCHRIER, M.D. (WA-08)

June 22, 2023

The Honorable Mike Bost  
Chairman  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States House of Representatives  
364 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20003

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States House of Representatives  
364 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to your committee about the needs of our Veterans, and to elevate what we're hearing in our districts directly to the committee. We have over 500,000 Veterans in Washington State, with roughly 50,000 in the 8th District. If you dedicated your life to protecting our country, it's our responsibility to make sure you receive the best service and care possible.

As a physician, I mean that quite literally- access to care is of utmost importance to me. I was proud to stand with my colleague last Congress and vote for the Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act or **Honoring our PACT Act**, which is now law. This means that over 3.5 million Veterans exposed to toxic substances during their service will get the health care they deserve. **My ask of the committee on this front is oversight.** I have heard concerns from my district about how to get enrolled to receive this care, and I have concerns about workforce readiness to meet this increase in patient demand. I know there is work being done on the ground in my state, including a focus on hiring and the creation of a Performance Dashboard, which allows for transparency- patients can see the type of claims newly available to them, and the wait time associated. I stand ready to support efforts like these and make this transition as smooth as possible for our Veterans. We need to make sure everyone eligible is covered; please consider me a partner in this effort as you move forward.

Accessing care should be simple for our Veterans. Last Congress, I was proud to vote yes on Ranking Member Takano's **Ensuring Veterans' Smooth Transition Act or the EVEST Act**. This bill allows for qualifying Veterans to be automatically enrolled in VA health benefits after they leave the military. Auto-enrollment takes out one more step where we could lose Veterans through the cracks. I was glad this passed the House and would like to see **it move in the Senate and become law.**

It's not just the physical health of Veterans we need to be concerned about- it is also their mental and behavioral health. I have long advocated for increased screenings for Veterans as they move through the

**Transition Assistance Program, or TAP**, to look for signs of social isolation, a predictor of mental health issues and the potential to end up unhoused. I have also recently learned that the addition of a spouse at TAP sessions can improve adherence and health outcomes. I hear from the district, often, the need for mental and behavioral health support. Whether it is building up our workforce, easing access, or moving care upstream, **I stand ready to help this committee deliver for our Veterans.**

Veterans traveling far and wide to appointments is also something I am monitoring in my district. We have very rural parts of the district with limited care options, meaning that I have constituent Veterans who travel from:

- Ellensburg to Yakima (approx. 80 miles round trip)
- Cle Elum to Yakima (approx. 120 miles round trip)
- Arlington to Seattle (approx. 80 miles round trip)
- Wenatchee to Seattle (approx. 300 miles round trip)
- Wenatchee to Spokane (approx. 340 miles round trip)

To receive care. **The distance itself is a major burden for Veterans in our district because many of them are of advanced age or disability and cannot travel alone or drive themselves.** Last month a Veteran constituent in Arlington submitted a casework request asking for help with his mileage reimbursement after he drove about 90 miles roundtrip for an appointment at the Seattle VA that was cancelled by staff after he arrived (and after he had waited hours for his appointment!). In his case, because he didn't technically attend his appointment, he was not eligible for mileage reimbursement. I would love to see more opportunities to make sure Veterans like my constituent in Arlington are not in this situation in the future.

One issue I have come to this committee often on is on **Electronic Health Record Modernization program**. The Go Live started out of Mann-Granstaff VA Medical Center in Spokane, WA in 2020. A satellite of that facility is the **Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) located in Wenatchee, WA**- in my district. The CBOC was included in part of this roll out. The attempted upgrade of the electronic health record at the VA has gone poorly. A pilot of the Cerner EHR, a system used successfully in the military, and in hospitals and clinics across the country, failed miserably in its rollout at the VA. Orders went unseen. Follow up appointments were not scheduled. The computer system was crashing on a regular basis. And doctors and nurses were having to devote significant time to navigating the health record, time that should have been spent with their patients.

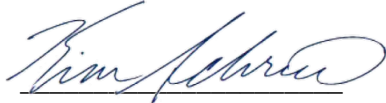
I was glad to join the Chairman and Ranking Member on their bipartisan proposal, **the RESET Act**, to include a number of changes to improve issues with patient safety, staff dissatisfaction and overall management failure since creation in 2018. I was also glad to see the VA themselves paused the Go Live to work out the issues I've stated here. This roll out has endangered our Veterans, and I want to make sure that any future Go Lives are centered around lessons learned, including provider training, and better tracking of patient outcomes. **Our Veterans deserve better.** I thank the leadership on this committee for their persistence on this topic, and for including me and other members of the Washington delegation as part of the solution.

Finally, I want to uplift the impact of our **Vietnam-Era Veterans Pinning Ceremony** in the 8<sup>th</sup> District. Since coming to office in 2019, I have pinned over 170 Vietnam Veterans. Each ceremony is special. Few of these Veterans ever got the gratitude and welcome home they deserved. This pinning ceremony allows us to honor these Veterans while they are still here and thank them for their service. This is one of my

favorite parts of my job. It allows me to connect with families, listen to their stories, and hear their wisdom as we try and make this country a better place for our Veterans.

Thank you again, Chairman Bost and Ranking Member Takano, for considering the needs of Washington's 8<sup>th</sup> District as you continue your work this Congress. I look forward to partnering with you both, and I will continue to go to bat for Washington's Veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kim Schrier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and a long, sweeping underline.

Kim Schrier, M.D.

MEMBER OF CONGRESS