

June 13, 2016

TO: The Subcommittee on Health
FROM: Carroll J. Knott
SUBJECT: Veterans Affairs Health Care System

I look forward to having the opportunity to bring some of these items up for discussion. I am a Past All American State Commander of the Louisiana Veterans of Foreign Wars and I currently serve as a member of the Louisiana Commission of Veterans Affairs and am representing the VFW.

1. There is a serious problem with the Psychology Department. These men and women are placed on lockdown and can't go outside. After they are in for 5 or 6 days they want to put them on outpatient care. The only problem is the people in the Psychology Department want them to sleep at the Salvation Army where there are more drugs being passed around then you can believe. There should be more beds to hold these people so better observations can be made. I have a problem when a veteran calls and is in distress and asks to speak to a counselor and a clerk tells him or her it will be 30 days before he can be seen. We had that happen 3 weeks ago and I was asked to speak to the veteran because I am with the St. Martin Sheriff's office. (problem was the veteran made the comment that if he went to the park and started shooting people then he would be seen) After meeting with him we told him to go to the Emergency Room at VA Alexandria and the problem was solved. The clerk could have done the same thing and prevented what could have been a very serious problem.
2. I know of a VFW Past Louisiana State Commander who went to the Lafayette Clinic and was treated poorly so he came to Alexandria and was treated the same way by the clerks and the staff. A friend of his told him to go to the VA Clinic in Lubbock, Texas. The clerks and the people in the halls were so nice and went out of their way to help him. Needless to say he drives 250 miles with no reimbursement to be treated as he feels a Veteran should be.
3. There is a Veteran who came to the Alexandria clinic who was having problems with the heel of his left foot. Screws were put in the heel of his foot, within a short period of time one of the screws broke. He came to Alexandria VA and was told not to worry. The veteran came to VA Alexandria several times complaining about his foot. A year later he could not take the pain anymore; Alexandria sent him to Tulane Hospital where they had to amputate his left leg and that was six years ago.
4. The Lafayette VA Clinic: Whoever made the decision to locate the clinic where it is made a very poor decision because they picked one of the busiest streets in Lafayette. I really believe we will have major accidents turning left against traffic to enter the parking lot and just as many turning left to get out of the parking Lot. The only thing that might remedy the situation is if we can use

a street in back of the clinic that goes through a residential area. That may be a problem because the people may not like that much traffic on their street.

5. The parking lot: There is ample parking at the Lafayette Clinic, but our older Veterans will not be able to walk the distance to get to the clinic from where they have to park. I guess we may have to Valet Park like the new Hospital in New Orleans will have. The last heavy rain we had in Lafayette was about 3" and there was no less than 4" of water on the parking lot so I guess we will need rubber boots.
6. Unions: my understanding is that the union has a very large input as to who is hired at the Alexandria VA Hospital. Once the employees are on the payroll it's almost impossible to get rid of them even if they are terrible employees. Mr. Jackson, a union representative, reportedly told past directors who and when to hire as though he was in charge. There is something wrong with that picture if it's a true statement.
7. The Directors may have the solution to Alexandria's problems, if the VA Secretary gets his staff to negotiate a more responsible union contract for 2017, holding union workers from the clerks on up more responsible for their poor attitude and service.
8. From the outside looking in, it seems that in the last 7 years we have had a change of Directors very often. I know there are things we veterans may not know but I am sure the employees must get very nervous when Directors are changed that often which can affect their service to veterans.
9. One of the most serious problems that the veteran has is trying to call the VA for anything. You call the 800 # and you are told "please hold your call is important to us" and you keep holding and the message keeps playing; you are on hold for 45 minutes then you hang up and you become very frustrated with the VA System. Something needs to be done with the telephone system, maybe hire more people to answer the phones; you are unable to leave a message to your provider because you do not get to speak to a live person or given the opportunity to leave a message.