

**Statement of Randy T. Johnson**  
**Before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
June 12, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Bost, Ranking Member Takano, and members of this Committee.

My name is Randy Johnson. I am a resident of the Northern Mariana Islands, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, and for the past decade I have had the privilege of assisting fellow veterans in the Northern Marianas, helping them navigate the VA system, and access the benefits they earned through their service.

I have traveled nearly 8,000 miles to be here today to speak in support of H.R. 3400, the Territorial Response and Access to Veterans' Essential Lifecare Act, known as the TRAVEL Act, introduced by our delegate, Congresswoman Kimberlyn King-Hinds.

This is a good bill. In the Northern Marianas, we do not have a VA medical center. We do not have consistent access to specialty care or mental health services. When veterans need more than basic care, we are often told to leave the island, traveling thousands of miles, paying out of pocket, and spending weeks away from our families.

The TRAVEL Act helps to change that. It allows the Department of Veterans Affairs to send traveling VA physicians into remote communities like ours. Instead of forcing the veteran to chase care across oceans, this bill brings care to the veteran. That is the right direction.

I am here to voice my support for the TRAVEL Act. But I also came this distance to give voice to the hundreds of veterans who could not be here. Veterans who served this country with honor, who, like me, are not asking for special treatment. We are asking for what we would receive if we lived anywhere else in the United States.

We are the only place in the nation where a veteran can call home but have no access to a Community Based Outpatient Clinic. No CBOC at all. Veterans from every conflict, past and present, have been told that if they want the full range of care they have earned, they cannot live at home.

Veterans seeking care at home see one doctor, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dr. Ada has done a good job, but there is only so much one person can do. Her office has one VA Registered Nurse, a veteran herself. But if she needs care, or takes a much-needed vacation, there is no one left to keep pace.

Decisions on care, travel, and benefits happen in Guam or Hawaii. Resources come from Guam or Hawaii. And when those places are struggling or overloaded, we cannot reasonably expect them to prioritize our needs.

But what we want, and what I believe we have earned, is the right to live in the country we fought for, in the community we fought for, and to have our service speak for itself. We should not have to choose between access to care and being home with our families. We stood the watch. We answered the call. That should be enough.

I served in Iraq. I saw combat. And I received the Purple Heart for it. I traveled here by choice, but many veterans are forced to travel simply to receive the care they need. That should not be the case.

In the Northern Marianas, I have served alongside and advocated for generations of veterans, those who fought in Vietnam, Panama, Iraq, and Afghanistan. All of them returned home to a system still not built to meet their needs.

As I made my way here, I thought of the Vietnam veterans in their 70s and 80s who served our nation even before our islands were formally part of this country. They have spent a lifetime fighting for benefits that only trickled in, slowly, over decades. Now, even in their later years, they are still being asked to travel off-island for basic, sometimes life-sustaining care. I think of how difficult this travel is for them.

I thought of the Gulf War veterans who opened a new chapter in America's military history, but returned to the same old gaps in care and support.

And I thought of my own generation, those who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. We served with commitment. We returned home with hope. But we still face the same cycle of delay, denial, and distance.

Of this new generation of veterans, I am proud to be part of a group that is organizing to support one another directly. Project Buddy Check 670 is an example of that effort. It reflects our belief that care for veterans does not always come in the form of a pill or a prescription. Sometimes, it comes from another veteran picking up the phone, checking in, and listening.

Project Buddy Check is a reminder that veterans seeking care that treats us as people, not just patients. But when even ordinary medical care is so far out of reach, how can we expect the system to provide the mental health and holistic support our veterans truly need?

Generations of veterans have answered the call from our islands. I know the challenges we face are difficult to address. But again, we stood the watch. We bore the burden. That should be enough. It is time the system answered back.

H.R. 3400 is a strong start. I respectfully ask this committee to support it and to continue advancing policies that bring real access and real dignity to every veteran, no matter

where they live. Thank you for your time, and for your unwavering commitment to those who served.