

## **Congressman Rick Crawford**

### **Testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Committee**

Good morning, Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Walz, and distinguished members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee today on behalf of the Veterans of the First Congressional District of Arkansas.

Statewide, out of approximately three million residents, more than 230,000 Veterans call Arkansas “Home.” Their service and sacrifice to their country truly humbles me, and I am honored to represent so many of them in the First Congressional District. Personally, as a Veteran, myself, of the United States Army, the son of a United States Air Force Veteran, and the brother of Veterans, I attest to the hard work and incredible sacrifices required of our service-members and their families.

Too often, Veterans across the United States experience frustrations and difficulties with medical bills. Furthermore, excessive wait times for appointments at Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) hospitals and clinics greatly exacerbate these problems. Considering these men and women willingly offered their minds and bodies to protect the freedoms we enjoy, I believe our Country owes them a great debt in return. Consequently, we must ensure the VA increases timely and quality healthcare for Veterans as its greatest priority.

Currently, the complexity of the VA health system spreads confusion and presents challenges for Veterans within my Congressional District. Based upon their residency, Veterans must navigate through three separate VA hospitals and three separate Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISN). This disjuncture has led to numerous billing complaints from non-VA providers and Veterans themselves.

In fact, I directly sought information on why receiving timely payments by the VA provided such an issue for non-VA providers and Veterans. Earlier this year, I held a meeting with hospital administrators from across the First Congressional District and representatives from each of the three VA hospitals that serve my Congressional District. I learned that both Veterans and non-VA providers alike view the VA's approval process for services as both cumbersome and confusing. These difficulties are worsened by interacting with three VA hospitals and three VISNs. Furthermore, the documentation required by the VA to determine a Veteran's eligibility is expensive for non-VA providers and inconsistent with the requirements for Medicare. Lastly, the VA's 90-day filing requirement is too short—particularly with the additional data non-VA providers must provide—and again, inconsistent with Medicare and other insurance carriers.

Each of the non-VA providers present at the meeting informed me and the VA hospital representatives they had to hire designated staff for VA billing. When these designated staff members inquired about rejected bills with the VA, they failed to get direct answers from the VA. Considering this information, I urge the Committee to streamline the VA's community care programs—more specifically the numerous eligibility requirements—and determine if aligning VA reporting requirements with Medicare and other insurance carriers is feasible.

Following my meeting, I know one of the VA hospitals has now hired a new staff member that will serve as a liaison to non-VA providers, strengthening community partnerships. Many Veterans' nearest VA facilities cannot provide Veterans the specific treatments or care they need, resulting in a Veteran seeking medical care from non-VA providers. Consequently, we must continuously strive to enhance the partnerships between the VA and non-VA providers. This cooperation will improve access to healthcare for our Veterans when the VA cannot meet their specific healthcare needs.

My commitment will always be to protect those who have served and continue to serve our great Country. The care of our Veterans should never be a political issue, and I will continue fighting to guarantee that our Veterans receive the care they deserve. I look forward to partnering with the Committee in the days ahead to create meaningful and effective reforms that ensure our Veterans receive the care we promised them as a Nation. I remain available to the Committee for further assistance, and I thank you for your consideration.