

Good afternoon,

I want to touch on three topics today: the need for investments at the Manchester VA Medical Center, my legislation to increase benefits for surviving spouses of veterans with a disability rated 100% at the time of their death and for spouses of servicemembers killed in the line of duty. And finally, my legislation to expand eligibility for dental care to all enrolled veterans.

Acting VA Secretary Wilkie recently responded to a letter the New Hampshire Delegation sent

to the VA about the infrastructure conditions at the Manchester VAMC. In his response, Acting Secretary Wilkie noted that “nearly all facility infrastructure and utility systems were identified as deficient.” To note:

- Hundreds of building infrastructure systems were graded as ‘D’ or ‘F’;
- Water and sewer piping infrastructure are all beyond their expected life cycles.

The same letter notes that there is a risk of another catastrophic flood like the one we had last year, which destroyed large portions of the

medical center, because it is not possible to find and replace all of the mixed-metal pipefittings like the one that broke and caused the flood.

I respectfully ask for your support for projects at the Manchester VA Medical Center that will upgrade the facility's infrastructure and expand the facility's surgical, primary care, and mental health capacity.

I'd now like to turn to the Surviving Spouses Income Security Act, which will increase the DIC benefit for surviving spouses of 100% service-

connected disabled veterans and the surviving spouses of servicemembers killed in the line of duty.

This bill is the top legislative priority for Gold Star Wives of America. Many surviving spouses who receive DIC are in their 80s. They cannot make up the income they lose when their spouse passes away, leaving many to severely struggle financially. Other than COLAs, we have not increased DIC since 1993, and DIC payments, when compared to the surviving spouses of other federal employees, lag behind by almost 12 percent. It's time to raise this

benefit for surviving spouses of our heroes.

They sacrificed, too, and should not spend the end their lives in poverty. I respectfully ask you to consider a hearing on this bill and to support increasing DIC.

I would also like to ask for your support for my legislation to expand eligibility for dental care. Health insurance shouldn't end at the neck, and neither should the VA's standard medical benefits package. Poor dental health can lead to other significant health conditions. Our veterans are not receiving the dental care they deserve, and expanding eligibility over time, as

my bill does, would get us to a place where all veterans can get the dental care they have earned.

Thank you.