



Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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Testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Full Committee Hearing – Member Day: Testimony and Proposals on the Department of Veterans Affairs May 16, 2018

Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz:

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Committee's first-ever bipartisan Member day. I commend my colleagues on the Committee for your efforts to improve the lives of our nation's veterans. Today, I would like to address two important areas that have impacted veterans in my district and across the country.

First, I would like to call attention to the Veterans Integrated Service Networks' (VISN) lack of effective oversight and support of veterans in my District and across the country. In my district, the VA Roseburg Healthcare System (VARHS) has been plagued by years of substandard patient care and poor management. ***Despite my repeated insistence, VISN 20 Northwest Network did nothing to address the serious issues.***

Dozens of courageous employees put their careers on the line to blow the whistle and help them better serve our vets. It took my direct appeal to former Secretary Shulkin and negative national news coverage for VA to finally launch an investigation and ultimately make improvements to VARHS, including replacing the entire senior leadership team.

If VISNs cannot function at a high level and competently fulfill their duty to perform meaningful oversight, I recommend the abolishment of the VISN structure and the establishment of a stronger oversight authority. Our veterans deserve better.

Secondly, I urge the committee to take up legislation to authorize VA work-study student positions in congressional offices.

Previously VA work-study students were paid to work in congressional offices on veterans' casework issues, while also attending school. In 2009, however, bureaucrats determined that this highly successful program was never authorized and terminated it.

As you know, a significant portion of congressional casework is serving veterans. There is no more appropriate way to serve our constituents and to honor our veterans than by training and entrusting veterans to help their fellow veterans. I urge the Committee to authorize and reinstate this popular program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on these and other important issues.