

Statement of Congressman Mike Johnson (LA-04)
Submitted to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee
May 16, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Takano, and members of the committee. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide input during the committee's "member day" hearing to address the needs of our veterans.

Louisiana is home to many men and women who have selflessly put on the uniform and served in our nation's Armed Forces. I am truly honored to represent more than 54,000 of our nation's veterans who live in Louisiana's Fourth Congressional District. Home to two vital military installations, Fort Polk and Barksdale Air Force Base, our community holds a deep respect for our service members and regularly comes together to support our troops upon their return home from deployments. Like most Americans, I greatly appreciate the sacrifices they have made in service to our nation, and as members of Congress, we must fulfill our obligation to take care of them after their service.

In keeping with today's time constraints, I'd like to highlight some of the issues the veterans of Louisiana face, and ways I believe we can assist them and honor their service.

When traveling throughout my district, I hear many of the same concerns from our veterans. The vast majority of the fifteen parishes that make up my district are rural. For most veterans, they are forced to choose between traveling great lengths to receive care at a VA facility, or enrolling in the Choice Program to receive the healthcare and routine treatments they need. This committee has taken important steps to optimize the Choice Program and has

recognized that there is still much room for improvement to ensure all of our veterans, including those in rural areas, receive nothing but the absolute best care.

I want to impress upon this committee how critical this program has become for so many of Louisiana's veterans, and I ask that each of you take this into account when considering future legislation that may impact this program.

Of course, our obligation to our veterans does not end there. We must also uphold our promise to deliver the earned benefits they so rightfully deserve. This committee has shown bold leadership in restoring many of these benefits to veterans and their families, and we thank you.

I'd like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention three pieces of legislation that I have cosponsored and believe would better serve our veterans and their needs after their service.

Veterans who receive retirement payments and disability payments have earned these benefits for different reasons. Unfortunately, many veterans in my district have seen their disability pay deducted from their retirement pay. A veteran who has served this country should not have to suffer one earned benefit being deducted from another, and thus, should be fairly compensated for their sacrifices. The *Retired Pay Restoration Act* would right this wrong for the many veterans in my district and I urge swift consideration by the committee.

Additionally, I know that all of us are committed to helping our veterans who are in crisis. With 20 veterans committing suicide each day, we must exhaust all possible avenues to ensure these men and women have the necessary resources available to them. The *Veteran*

Overmedication Prevention Act would provide much-needed insights into prescription drug overdoses and veteran suicides. Also, the *Homeless Veteran Families Act* would help keep families together by funding community agencies that provide shelter through the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem. We can do more to honor our veterans and give them a helping hand during difficult times. Both of these bills would help our heroes overcome some of their greatest challenges.

In closing, I want to thank you all for considering these important priorities for the veterans in my district and for all of our nation's brave service members. I look forward to doing everything I can to support the committee's work to provide our veterans with the best possible healthcare, transitional resources they need to succeed after their service, and the well-deserved benefits they were promised. I have no doubt this committee has the best interests of our veterans at heart and that they are a top priority for our nation.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your leadership and truly appreciate the time you all take to consider these priorities and the opportunity to show this continued support for our nation's veterans.