

Rep. Renacci Statement

Members of the Committee, I'm thankful to have the opportunity to come before you today and speak on veterans' issues along with several of my colleagues. It is my sincere belief that one of my most important duties as a Congressman is to ensure that our nation's veterans receive the benefits, treatment, and care they deserve.

In 2011, Congressman John Carney of Delaware and I founded the Bipartisan Working Group, or BPWG for short. Over its 8 years of existence, it has consisted of roughly 20 members from both parties interested in forging consensus on issues where it could be achieved. Through this group, I have formed friendships and partnership with colleagues on both sides of the aisle, including members of this Committee.

Last year, BPWG unveiled a package of VA reforms called the Accountability for Quality VA Healthcare Act. Like its name implies, the intent of this legislation is to provide a series of reforms to ensure our veterans receive top quality care at our VA Medical Centers.

One of the provisions is a bill I introduced meant to address nurse recruitment and retention issues in the Veterans Health Administration. It is estimated that 40,000 new registered nurses will be needed through 2018 to maintain adequate staffing levels.

The problem is that the current hiring process in the VHA is so complex that it puts the VHA at a disadvantage in recruiting nurses when facing stiff competition of the private sector. Like the veterans seeking treatment, these prospective nurses are also found waiting on the VHA to see to them. After a nurse is hired, he or she can be waiting for up to 6 months before they can actually start working. It is estimated that because of the slow hiring process, about 13% of nurse candidates drop out during the waiting period after they are hired.

My bill seeks to alleviate this shortfall by requiring the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to prepare a report for Congress regarding the VHA's efforts to recruit, hire, and retain nurses at each of its medical facilities. This report will also consider the resources provided to achieve these goals and recommendations for Congress on any legislation necessary to improve the VHA's nurse recruitment and retention efforts.

It is my hope that as the Committee continues its work the rest of this session, BPWG can work with members of the Committee on addressing the concerns our legislation seeks to fix. There are over 50,000 veterans living in my district – and thousands more in each of yours – who deserve the very best for the sacrifices they have made for our country. I am committed to making sure they receive their due benefits, and I look forward to working with each of you.

Thank you for the chance to appear before you today.