

Statement of the Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan before the
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
for the Full Committee Hearing on “Member Day:
Testimony Proposals on the Department of Veterans Affairs”
Wednesday, May 16, 2018

Chairman Roe, Ranking Member Walz, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the time to tell you about the veterans in my district, the Northern Marianas, and the need to make basic VA services available and accessible to them as they are to veterans everywhere else in America. Specifically, a full-time VA clinic with VA providers, a Vet Center, and a staffed Veterans Benefits office.

Marianas veterans served in the same military, fought in the same wars, and suffered injury, mental and physical, just like veterans from every other U.S. state and territory. Yet unlike veterans living in every other U.S. areas, Marianas veterans have no VA clinic or VA physician dedicated to serving them. Instead, Marianas veterans have a part-time outreach clinic with part-time doctors who juggle care for veterans with care for private patients.

Marianas veterans have no Vet Center to provide them or their families the social and psychological services necessary for them to successfully transition back to everyday life.

Marianas veterans have no VA Benefits Office they can go to for assistance. Veterans on Saipan wait months to receive in-person assistance; And when VBA staff from Guam or Honolulu do visit, they only have six hours or less to meet with veterans who need help. VBA staff visit the islands of Tinian and Rota even less, once a year on average.

I have taken every opportunity as a Member of the committee to raise these issues with VA officials and veteran groups, and because of that there has been some improvement in the last year. Guam Vet Center staff has begun readjustment counseling services to veterans and their families. A needs assessment is underway that will hopefully result in a Vet Center. Guam VBA staff have increased their visits. The VA Pacific Islands Health Care System leadership have hired a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and made telehealth services, and in-person visits from specialists possible. But this is not enough. The Northern Marianas remains the only area without a full-time VA clinic with VA providers, a Vet Center, and a staffed Veterans Benefits Office.

Congress has given the VA billions of dollars to carry out its mission of caring for our nation’s veterans. The VA should be doing more to serve veterans in the Northern Marianas. A full-time VA clinic with VA providers, a Vet Center, and a staffed Veterans Benefits office are good places to start.