

Rep. Titus Veterans Committee Testimony

Thank you Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz.

As a former member of this Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to come back to testify about issues of importance to veterans in my district of Las Vegas.

Today I would like to address several issues that I have been working on throughout my time in Congress: veterans' access to marijuana, modernizing the appeals process, and VA testing on animals.

Veterans' Access to Marijuana

As a founding member of the Cannabis Working Group and the House Cannabis Caucus, I have fought to modernize our nation's marijuana laws.

I am a proud cosponsor of the VA Medicinal Cannabis Research Act and thank the Chairman, Ranking Member, and Congressman Correa for their work on this bipartisan legislation.

This bill will remove barriers to critical research of medical marijuana as a treatment of chronic pain and PTSD. I am glad to see this Committee approve the legislation, and I hope the full House will swiftly pass it.

Medicinal marijuana has the potential to help veterans suffering from combat-related conditions and diseases, and we must, at the bare minimum, allow research on its potential health benefits.

This is all the more important in light of the nationwide opioid epidemic.

Our veterans are twice as likely to die from an opioid overdose as the average American, and we owe it to them to provide the full range of alternatives to pain management and PTSD treatments.

Veterans Appeals

The second issue I would like to focus on is the appeals process. For more than 4 years I worked with the VA and VSOs to address this problem.

I introduced legislation to update the process, and my legislation became the basis of the new law signed last August.

One of my constituents waited 8 years for his appeal to be resolved. He was awarded a 70% rating and retroactive payment of more than \$134,000 but unfortunately in the interim had hired an attorney who took 30% of his retroactive settlement. This is not uncommon.

Many lawyers have veterans sign agreements promising a percentage of their retroactive amounts, even though these lawyers do little more than refer these cases to our congressional offices.

Addressing this appeals backlog and working to successfully implement the modernized appeals process remain priorities of mine.

In January I came back to this Committee to participate in a hearing on implementation of the new law.

We must get this process right, and I hope whoever becomes the new VA Secretary will be committed to carefully and successfully implementing the new program.

PUPPERS Act

The third and final issue I would like to address today is the cruel and wasteful canine testing conducted by the VA.

Some of the experiments conducted at VA facilities involve inflicting extreme pain on our canine companions with little or no relief.

That's why Congressman Brat and I introduced the PUPPERS Act to address this issue.

Our bill has the support of a dozen VSOs, who recognize that this testing is not the answer.

As a longtime advocate of animal protection, I firmly believe that we should not be using taxpayer dollars to fund painful and unnecessary experimental procedures on animals when other technologies are available.

Before Secretary Shulkin was unceremoniously fired, I spoke with him about this issue.

He told me in no uncertain terms that under his watch, the VA was winding down

their dog testing program, with the goal of phasing it out completely.

I hope that our next VA Secretary will make this same commitment, and that my colleagues will support the PUPPERS Act.

Again I thank you for hosting this Members' Day and providing us an opportunity to discuss these important issues.