Rep. Juan Vargas HVAC Member’s Day Testimony

• Good afternoon.

• Thank you Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz for holding this first-ever House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs’ Member’s Day.

• I’m Congressman Juan Vargas and I represent California’s 51st District.

• I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the VA San Diego Region Office’s recent efforts to provide some relief to deported Veterans.

• In Tijuana, Mexico, just a few miles south of my district, are veterans who
may be eligible for VA disability benefits.

• As you know, to be eligible for benefits, a veteran must file a VA compensation or pension claim.

• After the claim has been filed, the veteran must present himself for a compensation and pension (C&P) exam.

• This is a very important step in the claim decision process.

• The C&P exam helps the VA determine if the veteran has a disability related to military service or if a veteran should receive an increased rating.
• These examinations are normally administered through VA here in the U.S.

• This makes it nearly impossible for deported veterans to complete the claim filing process.

• As a result, they are unable to access the benefits they earned or the medical care they urgently need.

• Deported veterans have no treatment options for PTSD or other wounds and trauma they sustained during their service.
• Many of my colleagues have gone with me to visit the deported veterans, hear their stories, and raise awareness of this great injustice.

• As a result of our efforts, the VA San Diego met with a contract vendor to provide C&P examinations in Mexico.

• They recruited providers and I am pleased to announce that an examination location was established in Tijuana.

• Since last November, the VA San Diego has been scheduling C&P examinations for veterans in Tijuana.
• Regardless of immigration status, all U.S. military veterans are entitled to treatment at VA medical facilities.

• However, few deported veterans are granted the necessary waivers to access that care either in the states or abroad.

• If you serve our country honorably, you are an American hero, regardless of your immigration status.

• As you may be aware, in the 1990’s, immigration reforms reclassified many low-level, non-violent offenses as
aggravated felonies mandating deportation.

- As a result, the United States has deported an unknown number of veterans.

- Last Summer, Ranking Member Walz and my office led a bipartisan letter to the Government Accountability Office requesting a study to answer many questions including:

  (1) “What is the total number of veterans that have been deported since January 1990 and to what countries?” and;

  (2) “How many deported veterans are suffering from a health issue (including
mental health issues), have a disability, and/or a service connected disability?”

• As we await the completion of the GAO study, the VA should be thinking about how to provide these veterans with the benefits they earned through their service to our nation.

• If you served honorably, you should have access to the medical services and treatments you need.

• These veterans fought for our country, it is past time for us to fight for them.

• Our country has a responsibility to provide these veterans with the benefits they earned, and bring them home.
• Until that time comes, we’re going to keep working here in Congress for deported veterans.

• I thank the committee for allowing me an opportunity to speak here today.