

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.