

Statement of Ranking Member Richard Burr

September 10, 2013

Thank you, Chairman Sanders. Good morning to you and to Mr. Flores and Ranking Member Michaud. Welcome to you, Commander Dellinger, and to the entire leadership team from The American Legion. I also want to extend a warm welcome to those who came from across the country to join us today, especially everyone from North Carolina. Thank you all for your service and for being here.

I will be brief, so we can get to the most important part of the day -- hearing from you about what we can collectively do to improve the lives of veterans, their families, and their survivors. As your testimony reflects, there are a number of inefficiencies and shortcomings in veterans' programs that we must work to address.

To start with, the claims backlog is completely unacceptable, with veterans facing too many delays and errors. As we press VA to get this situation under control, veterans can try to avoid some of these hassles by gathering up the evidence VA needs and sending it in with their claims. As you noted in your testimony, Commander, VA has been able to decide these fully-developed claims with fewer delays.

To encourage more veterans to take advantage of this option, I sponsored a bill to allow up to one year of retroactive benefits if a veteran's initial claim is fully-developed. This law took effect last month, and I appreciate the Legion's efforts to alert veterans about it. More importantly, I appreciate your organization's commitment to helping veterans across the country file fully-developed claims, so they can try to get their claims resolved more quickly.

Another area of concern is the high unemployment rate among some groups of veterans. That's why I continue to press for legislation that will require federal agencies to hire thousands of veterans to fill existing job vacancies and will allow more veterans to use their military training to obtain a license or credential needed for a civilian occupation. These changes, and updates to laws impacting veteran-owned small businesses, should help veterans succeed in today's job market.

There are many other issues you raised that deserve our attention, including the need to improve mental health care for veterans and ensure the safety of those seeking care from VA. I look forward to working with my colleagues and The American Legion on all of these important issues affecting veterans, their families, and their survivors.

Again, thank you all for being here and for sharing your input with us. I also thank the Chair and yield back.