

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Phil Roe
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Joint Hearing on the Legislative Presentation of the Veterans of Foreign
Wars (VFW)
March 1, 2017**

Good afternoon and thank you.

It is an honor and a privilege for me to be here with Ranking Members Tester and Walz to welcome you all to today's joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees to receive the legislative presentation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW).

Unfortunately, Chairman Isakson is on medical leave today and will not be able to attend this hearing.

I believe I can speak for the rest of the dais in wishing him a very speedy recovery.

Thank you all for your brave and honorable service to our nation – service that continues through your work with the VFW and your attendance here in Washington this morning.

I want to extend a special welcome to Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy and his wife, Jean.

Sir, thank you for your years of service in the United States Air Force, for your leadership within the VFW and for being here today to share your wisdom with all of us.

I also want to welcome the VFW Auxiliary National President, Colette Bishop.

Ma'am, thank you for being here and for all of the good work that the Auxiliary does for our veterans and their families.

I would also like to recognize the VFW members from my home state of Tennessee who are in our audience today.

Would you please stand or raise your hand and be recognized?

I am grateful not only to have you all here this morning but also for the work VFW and Auxiliary do across this country every day in service to our veterans and their families.

I am also grateful for the hard work VFW does right here in our Nation's Capital.

The legislative wing of VFW is a trusted partner in informing Congress and crafting legislation to drive constant improvement and increased accountability at VA.

I was pleased to learn that Ranking Member Walz has brought on the former Director of VFW's National Legislative Service, Ray Kelley, to serve as Staff Director for the House VA Committee's Minority side.

Ray, it's a pleasure to have you behind the dais with us

today.

Through the participation in roundtable discussions and providing materials for hearing and other activities, VFW's insights and frontline knowledge of the VA health care system continue to assist veterans struggling to receive VA care in a timely manner and inform the Committee where improvements are still needed.

Commander-in-Chief Duffy, I greatly appreciate your thorough and comprehensive testimony for today's hearing.

In it, you've touched on just about every aspect of VA healthcare and benefits.

I'm pleased to see support for many initiatives I have been advocating strongly for, such as the consolidation of Choice with other community care programs, using provider agreements to fill the gaps where VA cannot offer certain types of healthcare,

improving VA's aging IT infrastructure, and the inclusion of a strong network of women's-specific healthcare within VA.

As a veteran and private OB/GYN who took care of the health needs of female veterans for the Mountain Home VA Medical Center in Johnson City, Tennessee, I am acutely aware of the specific health needs of female veterans and will be working to see that those needs are met.

As I begin this journey as Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I will be looking to VFW for insight and guidance.

VFW's membership surveys provide comprehensive, quantitative data that will help frame the big picture of how our nation's heroes receive the care and benefits they have earned.

I am confident that, working together with the nearly 1.7 million members of the VFW and your Auxiliaries, there is no

challenge we can't meet on behalf of our veterans.

Thank you all once again.

I look forward to hearing your testimony today, Commander-in-Chief Duffy.

With that, I will now read a prepared statement that Chairman Isakson has asked me to read in his absence.

“Welcome to the hundreds of VFW members and Auxiliary members in attendance and a special welcome to Commander William Sandberg and the rest of the Georgia delegation.

I regret that I am unable to attend the hearing today as I am at home recovering from back surgery the rest of this week before returning to Washington, D.C.

I look forward to returning with a new and improved back to continue working harder than ever on behalf of veterans.

As I said at Secretary Shulkin's confirmation hearing, we're about making health care more available to veterans through care in both the private sector and VA.

We don't want to privatize VA. We want to empower it. I look forward to working collaboratively with you and other stakeholders to help improve the care and services for our veterans."

Again, that was a prepared statement from Chairman Isakson.

Commander, I want to thank you once again for being here today to share your views and I want to thank our audience members for coming in from every corner of the country to be with us today.