

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
*Wednesday, June 29, 2016*

U.S. Senator Deb Fischer

Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Blumenthal, good afternoon and thank you for holding today's hearing.

Through your leadership, this committee has addressed some of the most difficult issues that have faced our veterans.

Across the country, people's confidence in the care we provide to veterans has been understandably shaken.

As has been mentioned time and time again in this committee, veterans deserve more from us.

They expect more from us.

They expect us to uphold our end of the bargain.

The complications with the construction project in Denver, for example, have raised serious questions about our ability to provide veterans the high-quality care they have earned.

Partnerships across the aisle and across the branches of government have been important to overcoming the issues facing our veterans in the past.

By bringing about more partnerships between veterans, their communities, and the federal government, we have an opportunity to uphold our end of the bargain for our service members.

We can do this by tapping into the strength in our local communities.

Through community partnerships, our family members, neighbors, and businesses can give back to those who have given so much for them.

The VA has identified communities in Nebraska and across the country that are ready, willing, and able to contribute to improving our veterans' access to quality care.

These communities do not want to wait for Washington.

They are ready to restore the veterans' healthcare system.

They want to take an active role in restoring our national confidence in this system.

S. 2958 creates a pathway for local communities to do just that.

Local leaders have expertise in aligning both design and medical teams in the constructing of medical facilities.

Through the partnerships created in the legislation, local leaders would have the opportunity to manage construction projects from start to finish.

By allowing private sector experts to lead these projects, the VA can avoid issues that have haunted previous projects.

Our veterans, and the American people, deserve transparency. They deserve projects that are on time and on budget.

The VA has already appropriated millions of dollars to construction projects that are not yet finished.

This legislation would allow communities to contribute the remaining finances to complete these projects.

The VA's financial obligation for the construction of these medical facilities would be limited to the previous appropriation and not one dollar more.

This legislation can serve as a model for expediting the VA's efforts to coordinate its infrastructure with the needs of the veteran population.

Communities across the country are willing to help take on our national responsibility of caring for our veterans.

It is our responsibility to fully explore ways that empower them to do so.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.