

Rep. Doug Lamborn Opening Statement for Initial VA Conference Committee Meeting

I'd like to thank the Chairmen and Ranking Members of both the House and Senate VA Committees for your leadership on this issue. It's a real honor to be a member of this conference committee and I look forward to working with you all.

The lack of transparency at the VA and the very nature of data manipulation and secret wait lists have made it very difficult to expose the true nature of the troubles facing our veterans. There are almost 100,000 veterans living in my district. In an effort to find out what they are seeing I've held conference calls with local VSO leaders. I've spoken directly with the facility directors in Denver and Colorado Springs to evaluate the quality of care that my constituents are receiving. I've put out a call to veterans to have them call my office. We've subpoenaed documents and testimony, heard from numerous witnesses from the VA, I have sent multiple letters to the VA demanding answers, and I've supported legislation to expand "fee-basis" care, and to give VA leadership more flexibility to fire negligent employees that aren't doing their job. At first the VA attempted to downplay the significance and extent of the problem. Only through the efforts of whistleblowers, brave individuals from across the country that have taken great risk to

expose the truth, has the depth of the issues at the VA come to light. Subsequently, the interim VA-OIG report validated those whistleblower claims and has labeled them as systemic.

Yesterday, the VA's bimonthly access data showed that the electronic wait list for the VA Medical Center in Denver that provides care for many of my constituents, had more than doubled since their last report two weeks ago. This problem is not getting better, it's getting worse. We cannot kick this can down the road. We cannot simply seek to create an assembly line that gets veterans in and out faster without regard to the quality of care. Ultimately we must focus on changes that yield better healthcare outcomes for our veterans through timely access to quality care. In order to achieve this and ensure that the solutions are enduring, there are multiple items that have to be addressed.

Obviously we must pave the way for the VA to use non-VA care to expand veteran access and clear the current backlog. But this problem cannot, and should not, be fixed by simply throwing money at it. The VA has had more medical-care funding than it could spend during each of the last four fiscal years, to include \$1.4B as recently as 2010, and was set to carry over \$450M this year before dipping into those funds for the current Accelerating Access to Care Initiative. This has led to multiple testimonies by VA and non-VA witnesses who have

noted that the biggest issue that has led to this crisis is not a lack of funding, but a lack of accountability.

For this reason, the legislation that we mold must hold individuals accountable who fail to meet performance standards and oversee mismanagement and neglect. The perverse incentives that have led to the manipulation of scheduling data and secret lists must be eliminated. Any incentives going forward must have an impact on improving patient satisfaction, outcomes, and provider performance and productivity.

Finally, our ultimate product must protect whistleblowers that step forward to share the truth. The last thing they should face for bravely standing up for our veterans is retaliation.

As I said before, we cannot simply seek to create an assembly line that gets veterans in and out faster without regard to the quality of care. Ultimately, our efforts must lead to changes that yield better healthcare outcomes for our veterans. This is what our veterans have earned, and they deserve nothing less.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back the balance of my time.