

Statement of Senator John Boozman
“The State of VA Health Care”
May 15, 2014

Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Burr, thank you for this opportunity and the dedicated work of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. I enjoy serving with you both and all the members of this committee, and I look forward to reviewing the testimony from today’s hearing with Secretary Shinseki on the state of VA health care. Regretfully, I am unable to attend, as I am in Arkansas, recovering from a recent surgery. I appreciate Secretary Shinseki’s willingness to come before our committee and address our questions and deep concerns so we are able to move forward and better serve our veterans.

Last week, I sent a letter to Secretary Shinseki expressing my disappointment regarding recent allegations of “secret” wait lists and preventable veteran deaths. I have asked Secretary Shinseki for assurances that none of these deplorable practices are happening at VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) used by Arkansas veterans, and have yet to receive an acknowledgement that he even received my letter. I anxiously await its arrival, and a response.

I understand that in most respects VA does provide good care, when and where it is actually available. Additionally, I know that employees in various roles at VA, like me, strongly support those who have served our nation in uniform and believe the federal government should uphold all of its promises to our veterans and extend the best timely care to them. However, as recent reports indicate, this is not happening. This is a clear access problem, and warrants a full analysis of the future of VA health care as part of our effort at solving immediate problems. I have reservations about the ability of VA’s “face to face” audits to produce meaningful reform that will increase access for veterans and bring accountability to the process. I am supportive of rigorous oversight by this committee and I look forward to working with all of my colleagues on both the House and Senate Veterans’ Committees, in consultation with the Department of Veterans Affairs, to ensure that these systemic problems are fixed.

In conclusion, we need to be thoughtful about our responsibilities and cautious about our steps forward in regard to these very important issues. As always, I appreciate opportunities to work together and I will be reviewing the testimony and the record of today’s hearing to begin that process.