



*News From The ...*

## COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 16, 2012

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### VA Prosthetic Care at a Crossroads

**WASHINGTON, D.C.**—Today, the Subcommittee on Health held a hearing to examine VA's current capabilities to provide state-of-the-art care to veterans with amputations. The Committee heard testimony concerning VA's proposal to change procurement processes for prostheses, potentially hindering a veteran's ability to acquire the latest prosthetic and corresponding care and support.

"VA has been struggling to keep pace with the rising demands of younger and more active veterans with amputations," stated Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Health. "VA must continue to provide multi-disciplinary care to maintain long-term and life-time quality of life. Placing prosthesis procurement into the hands of contracting officers is alarming. VA needs to match the determination and spirit demonstrated by our wounded warriors and recommit themselves to becoming a leader once again in prosthetic care."

Currently, VA provides care to approximately 42,000 veterans with limb loss. As of August of 2011, 1,506 servicemembers had experienced amputations on active duty from Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom. An additional 2,248 veterans underwent major amputations at VA in 2011. VA prosthetic costs have more than doubled in the past five years, yet, VA's care has fallen behind that of the Department of Defense (DoD).

"Prosthetics are a truly individualized extension of one person's body and mobility, not your typical bulk supply purchase," stated Jim Mayer, a Vietnam veteran, double amputee, and wounded warrior advocate and mentor. "When today's warriors are referred to VA and seek the newer, cutting-edge, technologically superior prosthetics they have been accustomed to [through DoD], will VA be able to meet that demand? DoD centers of excellence provide state-of-the-art and often newly evaluative prosthetics that have allowed warriors to thrive, not just in walking, but also run competitively, compete in the Paralympics, rock climb, play myriad sports and other endeavors."

"Prosthetic technology and VA have come a long way from the Civil War era. Following World War II, veterans dissatisfied with the quality of VA prosthetics stormed the Capitol in protest. Congress responded by providing VA with increased flexibility for prosthetic options and federally funded research and development," said Buerkle. "As a result, VA has been a leader in helping veterans with amputations regain mobility and achieve maximum independence. This is why I am troubled by VA's proposed changes in procurement policies and procedures which shifts the emphasis from the doctors to contracting officers."

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