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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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Subcommittee Reviews Implementation of Technology to Address Backlog

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held an oversight hearing entitled, “Wading through Warehouses of Paper: The Challenges of Transitioning Veterans Records to Paperless Technology.” The Subcommittee has spent a large portion of the past two years exploring innovative ways to move the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) into the 21st century.

During the hearing Rep. Jon Runyan, Chairman of the Subcommittee, pointed out the need for better collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) to aid veterans who are transitioning out of the service, stating, “VA has a statutory duty to assist a claimant in obtaining certain records. Accordingly, it is important that we work together to ensure that VA is able to communicate both effectively and efficiently with both the National Archives and DoD to comply with this duty.”

It was recently brought to light that DoD’s poor record keeping habits have in turn had a negative impact on VA’s ability to fully carry out its responsibility to assist veterans in obtaining records from their time in service.

“Issues pertaining to the thoroughness of DoD’s record keeping have recently received media attention in light of evidence that some units were not properly documenting in-service events, such as combat-related incidents,” said Runyan. “This has been a source of significant frustration for many veterans who file claims with VA and are dependent on such documentation to substantiate their claims.”

Representatives from several Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) also testified at the hearing, including Jeffrey Hall, the Assistant National Legislative Director of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). Mr. Hall echoed the sentiments of Rep. Runyan that DoD and VA need to work together to make this process better for veterans. “DoD and VA must also work together to create a lifelong electronic record system for all servicemembers beginning at the moment of enlistment, and including all of their military medical and personnel records, including health records from VA and other public and private providers.”

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