

STATEMENT OF
JOHN D. HANSON
MEMBER, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON

THE STATE OF VETERANS HEALTH CARE IN NORTH DAKOTA
and
VIEWS OF VA FUNDING LEVELS

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

28 MARCH, 2008

Senator Conrad and Members of the Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to provide a view on Veterans Health Care and the Funding Levels of Health Care in North Dakota. I know that all of the Veterans and the Veterans organizations are very interested in what and how they will be affected with health care and the health care of our returning military.

I had the opportunity to visit with some soldiers at Walter Reed Army Hospital, on 29 February, 2008, while I was in Washington DC. While visiting the troops I saw brave, heroic and all volunteer soldiers that have given of themselves and of their families rallying beside, them until they recover and are finally able to return to their homes. But they have a long way to go until they are able to be trained to meet their needs, as a person with, you could say a "new normal" in their lives. The VA needs to start stepping up to the plate and start requesting funding for the troops who lost a limb, or sometimes, two or more. They will need to recover, learn how to adapt, and some will have to have homes adapted to them. With \$555 million going into Medical/Prosthetic Research, we have done enough, and now need to attend to the military and provide them with equipment that has already been tested, so they can learn how to adapt to the new arm(s) or leg(s), and for the families to be able to assist in all they can do to bring them home. What we need is funding now, not next year or the year after, we need to get them "whole" today to carry on the new life that they have. I know that this will cost thousands upon thousands of dollars, but we have to remember that the military of today is an all volunteer military, and we need to support them now. They all gave some, and some gave all. We need to have a message sent to the President that the Veterans will not take a NO for an answer when it comes to funding, of our military and take care of them, so that they know that they stood for us, now is the time we stand for them.

I know that the VA in Fargo is one of the top Veterans Hospital and the VA Compensation/ Claims area process the patients and the Compensation exams quickly, but that does not do any good if mistakes are made in rating the request. There simply are too many requests for compensation each and every day, which makes it seem like the job is getting done, but unfortunately it is not. It is not always the fault of the person who reads the claim, it is the, old antiquated system that they use to score the disability. This system needs to be changed now, and correctly. The system has been around since 1925, with the last revision completed in 1945. This system may be older than the fathers or mothers of the troops that are being rated at this very moment. There are over 2.3 million veterans and auxiliaries members in the Veterans of Foreign Wars who want to see action taken, now not in a few years, and with all the Committees that have to be formed and then reformed with recommendations to be looked at, then back to the committee, then back to start this process over again. Some of the Veterans that are filing claims today will die of old age before they receive what they earned, by wearing the military uniform.

The VFW and two other veterans groups in January voiced support for an overhaul of the disability rankings. Representatives from the VFW, the American Legion, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America generally supported recommendations made by the Veterans Disability Commission. As some of you know Congress created a commission in 2004. The commission published a 562 page report in October 2007 that included 113 recommendations. Some 35 % of disability ratings have not been updated as I stated before since 1945, but I want you to keep in mind how far back this was looked at. At the hearing a statement was made that "It is the failure of a highest magnitude if we don't provide these heroes who have sacrificed so much for their country with the benefits and services they need and deserve." Now is the time to insure that all of the ratings are taken a close look at, as we now have wounds and injuries that in other wars, this person would not have made it off the battle field, but now with modern technology they are coming home alive, but missing legs, arms, sometimes both, and they will live with what they accomplished before they gave of themselves, now action is needed to give it our all for them and the families, that are struggling physically and mentally. We cannot let them down like we let them down in the past.

I do want to thank Senator's Conrad, Senator Dorgan and Congressman Pomeroy for obtaining funding for the Clinics that are being set up in North Dakota which will make it easier for the Veterans to receive the care they need. I spoke with some people on what they thought of the VA Health Care System and the subject always comes up as to why a person who lives in the north west corner of North Dakota has to travel to Fargo to receive, for example cancer treatment or other care that can be taken care of in the "Home Town" of our veteran. Some travel for a day then stay over night, at a hotel, then the next day they receive treatment, then to the hotel if they can make it, if they are not to sick from the treatment to a hotel room to wait until the next day to take a van ride home again.