



Committee Minutes

COMMITTEE: Armed Services and Veterans Affairs
CHAIRPERSON: Haraz N. Ghanbari
DATE: May 18, 2022
TIME: 9:30 AM
ROOM: Room 018

Acting Chair Loychik called the committee to order at 9:33 a.m.

The clerk took the role, and with a quorum present the committee proceeded as a full committee. Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the chair brought forth the minutes of the previous committee meeting. Acting Ranking Member Sheehy objected requesting a change to wording, and noted he would approve following the correction.

The Chair Loychik brought forward H.B. 581 for its second hearing with proponent testimony. Witness Jacob D. Smith testified in support of allowing veteran service commissions to use county issued credit cards to assist veterans in their counties with temporary and necessary assistance.

Representative Brown noted Mr. Smith's testimony stated the use of credit cards would help with purchases on behalf of veterans, for example with clothing needed for a job, and asked how such purchases were currently made. Mr. Smith explained the first step is determining the veteran's eligibility for assistance. The veteran service commission would then work with the business in hopes the business would agree to the sale and payment once the county auditor approved the purchase and issued a check. Conversely, the veteran service commission may work with a local non-profit to request assistance in proving the money for the purchase.

Representative Brown, in a follow up question, asked if credit cards were permissible would the determination for the veteran's eligibility be approved before or after the purchase. Mr. Smith responded eligibility would need to be determined prior to the purchase. Mr. Smith noted the use of the credit card would expedite the overall transaction.

With no further testimony on H.B. 581, Chair Loychik concluded the second hearing.

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Chair Loychik brought forth H.R. 75 for its third hearing, and recognized Representative Richardson for the purpose of offering an amendment 134.3301. Representative Richardson explained members of the National Guard were called up to support communities during COVID-19, and could not be thanked enough for their service. She Acknowledged additional missions worthy of the accolade, while noting this amendment recognizes the performance of not just the food distribution mission but those who supported correction facilities, medical facilities, testing facilities, long-term care facilities and vaccine distribution centers.

Chair Loychik asked if the amendment should be agreed to. Hearing no objection the amendment became part of the resolution. It was then motioned to favorably report H.R. 75 to Rules and Reference Committee, and with 9 affirmative votes and 0 negative the resolution passed.

Chair Loychik then called H.C.R 46 for its second hearing. Mr. Jeremy Parkins provided in-person testimony.

Mr. Parkins, an Air Force Veteran who served from 1997- 2005, testified on behalf of H.C.R. 46. He stated the Veterans Administration system, at the time, was a revolving door with broken promises and medicine. He explained the systems lacked empathy which prompted him to no longer receive services from the VA. After a long recovery period, he had an education, job, and family. Was offered a job at the agency located in Chillicothe next to the VA. After encouraging many to go visit the VA, he himself was convinced to go back. He brought forth the question, why would someone who publically criticizes the VA defend it? He mentioned he was not scrutinizing the VA and the local care he received but rather the bad policies. He then got involved with Dress, Right, Dress and began to inquire with hundreds of vets who did not qualify for Medicare. They found the VA was specific to veteran care which is not often provided in public sector. He proceeded by stating that the VA was more than just a place of health but was a place that understood what was truly needed. He then followed up with detailed facts and data regarding VA attendance and veterans who actually visit and also the imperativeness of why the VA is crucial to the region. He concluded with an urge of support for H.C.R. 46.

Representative Gross questioned is it possible the VA offers services to veterans that cannot be offered elsewhere and cannot be replaced in the civilian world? Mr. Parkins responded he believes this to be true and provided stories on the topic.

Representative Gross then asked what would happen to the region's veterans if the facility were removed. Mr. Parkins said that veterans have made it clear should it be removed, they will not seek further care. Traveling is difficult for many and is simply not realistic. He also mentioned that veteran suicide will increase. This concluded Mr. Parkin's testimony.

Chair Loychik then recognized Ms. Jessica Fee for her testimony. Ms. Fee introduced herself and her organization along with who she represents. She explains their current staffing shortages while noting they have significant vacancies. Should they shrink their team however to units, they will go from 1700 positions to merely hundreds.

Ms. Fee then explained the Chillicothe facility offers insurance, decent wages, and employs

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several different groups of individuals. The culture is very accepting of veterans and disabled veterans. She asks will the rest of society accept them the same way though? She believes local businesses will suffer, real-estate taxes will suffer, and tax money for schools will drop. Families will either be forced to leave or enter unemployment as the VA is one of the largest employers. Her biggest concern that will happen, is that veterans will not go to seek help and will stay home and die alone. Veterans will choose not to burden and will suffer alone.

Representative Richardson stated that she appreciates the witness for advocating for the veterans. Question revolves around whether the witness or the witness's organization are petitioning those who have the control and authority at the U.S. Congress.

Ms. Fee responds yes. Have gone to several counties in southern Ohio and have met several people of authority. Still have a long fight ahead but the support of Ohio will be impactful.
Representative

Richardson thanks her and encourages her to keep up the fight.

Representative Fowler-Arthur then requests to speak and asks why the witness believes that other facilities in Columbus and Lancaster would not pick up the slack if Chillicothe shut down.

Ms. Fee replies yes. The areas in Columbus and Lancaster are not hospitals but rather are community clinics. Often they are one team deep with maybe some form of support staff. They aren't urgent cares, they are specifically a doctor's office. They will not meet the needs beyond a family doctor. The space in Columbus has no inpatient beds, rather it's a large-scale primary care unit. Other VA's are already extremely backed up and would not be able to provide additional care outside their regions.

Representative Fowler-Arthur follows up and offers another question. Are there other facilities along the borders of the state that might justify the removal of the Chillicothe VA or is an even greater distance?

Ms. Fee responds that one VA in Pennsylvania is closing, another in West Virginia is removing its emergency unit and closing their inpatient beds. Several more are slated for full closure. The VA's share a lot of loads, and specialties. They already send many in their directions and are still depended on.

With no further questions, or witnesses, Chair Loychik concluded the second hearing of H.C.R. 46.

With no further business to come before the committee, Chair Loychik adjourned.

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Haraz N. Ghanbari, Chair

Committee Secretary

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