

July 7, 2014

## Nolan Addresses Critical Veterans Affairs Issues



I hope you had a great Fourth of July weekend. In addition to greeting thousands of constituents at celebrations throughout Minnesota's Eighth District, I was honored to meet with some 80 veterans who packed the Servicemen's Quarters in Hibbing on Thursday for another in our series of districtwide veterans round tables. My message to them was simple and direct:

Our veterans are America's heroes and they deserve to be treated that way.

As the front page of Friday's Hibbing Daily Tribune (above) attests, we got a real earful from the vets and families in attendance – particularly on health care. Some had good things to say about their experiences with the VA medical system. Yet many others relayed disturbing stories of long waits for appointments, unclean conditions, shortages of basic supplies and medications, and difficulties dealing with staff.

Make no mistake. We will get to the bottom of these problems and fix them once and for all – in Hibbing, and wherever else these reports surface.

Everyone at the Hibbing round table did agree on several things: first, if you're a veteran, you're entitled to health care wherever you are. As one vet pointed out, no one should have to travel from International Falls to Minneapolis for an eye exam. Local care saves time and stress for vets, and mileage reimbursements for taxpayers.

The second: if you're a veteran, you're entitled to chiropractic care, which often proves to be a better alternative than prescription drugs for pain management.

I've been working hard to pass two pieces of legislation that would address both of these concerns - the HEALTHY Vets Act (H.R.635), which permits vets in rural areas to receive local care, and the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act (H.R.921), to make chiropractic care available at all major VA clinics by 2016 or before.

Many vets are also concerned with the quality of mental health care, particularly as it relates to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). And rightly so - on average, 29 vets a day commit suicide. While the physical wounds of war are relatively easy to identify, debilitating psychological scars can be much more difficult to assess, especially when symptoms appear many years later. If you're a vet suffering from PTSD, you should receive treatment. To that end, I am also working hard to pass H.R. 1725, the Veterans Mental Health Accessibility Act. This bill would allow veterans who served in combat from all military operations to seek treatment for service-connected mental illnesses, regardless of when their conditions manifest themselves.

And this week, I'll be communicating these concerns, along with others voiced by vets who attended our round tables in Duluth, Little Falls, and Brainerd, to members of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees for their review and consideration.

Finally, I have this request. If you're a veteran or family member, and you're experiencing a problem of any kind related to the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA benefits, or VA health care, please don't hesitate. Contact me, and my staff and I will leave no stone unturned to make it right. I'm honored to serve those who have served our great nation. Have a good week.

Sincerely,

Sen. Rick Nolan