VFW Outraged by VA Allegations

May 15, 2014

“The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is outraged and frustrated that nearly a month after some of these allegations surfaced, we still do not have the facts,” testified Ryan M. Gallucci today before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, regarding accusations that possibly 40 veterans may have died waiting for care at the Phoenix VA Medical Center.

“We do not know who the veterans are who may have died waiting for care,” said Gallucci, an Iraq War veteran and deputy director of VFW’s National Veterans Service directorate. “We do not know if other hospitals are cooking their appointment scheduling books just to keep up appearances, or if veterans waiting for care are paying for it elsewhere out of their own pockets. Regardless of what comes out of ongoing investigations in Phoenix, Wyoming, Atlanta, Chicago, Spokane and elsewhere, the VFW knows that veterans have died waiting for care, which is inexcusable,” he said. “And true or not, the allegations are causing veterans and their families to rapidly lose faith and confidence in a system that is supposed to care for them, which is unacceptable.”

Getting to the bottom of VA’s problems and restoring confidence prompted VFW National Commander William A. Thien to write President Obama last week to urge his personal involvement to fix the problems that are plaguing the VA, and consequently undermining the public’s trust in VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki and his organization. Yesterday the president dispatched one of his closest advisors, White House Deputy Chief of Staff Rob Nabors, to work with Secretary Shinseki to get to the bottom of what allegedly happened in Phoenix and elsewhere.

“The president heard our voice and took the appropriate action to add additional oversight to what has evolved into a crisis in confidence,” said Thien, a Vietnam War veteran from Georgetown, Ind., who reiterated the outrage of his members and their families.

“Last week we asked VFW membership to tell us their own VA stories. From hundreds of calls we learned some are very satisfied with their care, whereas others painted a picture of a VA healthcare system that is overburdened, under resourced, and at many times, paranoid. Everyone wants answers to the current allegations where none currently exist, which is why we need the VA Inspector General’s report to help separate truth from conjecture,” he said.

“Leadership, management and accountability are our principal requirements of the VA,”

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said the VFW national commander. “We helped to create the VA back in 1930, and over the years the VFW has worked hard with every Administration and Congress to increase the programs and services it provides to America’s wounded, ill and injured veterans and their survivors,” he said. “We will not let the VA fail.”