
Committee Meeting

of

SENATE MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

(SENATE BILL No. 413, SENATE BILL No. 1026, SENATE BILL No. 1189;
SENATE BILL No.1869 and ASSEMBLY BILL No. 1945 (1R);
and SENATE RESOLUTION No. 28)

LOCATION: VFW Post 2189
500 Bethel Road
Somers Point, New Jersey

DATE: May 21, 2010
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator James Beach, Chair
Senator Jeff Van Drew, Vice Chair
Senator Philip E. Haines



ALSO PRESENT:

Tracey F. Pino Murphy
Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide

Julius Bailey
Trish Graber
Senate Majority

Rosemary Pramuk
Senate Republican

Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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SENATOR JAMES BEACH (Chair): It's almost 10 a.m.; we might as well get started early.

If everyone could please rise, we'll salute the flag. You want to lead us, Phil?

SENATOR HAINES: Yes.

ALL: (recite the Pledge of Allegiance.)

SENATOR BEACH: Please be seated.

I think I'll stand because you may not be able to see me anyway from the back, but I would just like to say thank you so much for this wonderful turnout. It is the largest group that we've had at our Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and it's really heartwarming; and we really want to conduct some business today.

What I'll do is, we'll start out with the roll call, and then we have several bills today, and we'll explain them as we go through. And this is a meeting where we are actually voting on these bills to take them back to the Senate.

Roll call, please.

MS. PINO MURPHY (Committee Aide): Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Senator Connors is absent; Senator Rice is absent.

Vice Chairman Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: I'm here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Beach.

SENATOR BEACH: Here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: We have a quorum.

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you.

We just have a couple little announcements: If you have cell phones, if you could please put them on vibrate -- any electronics. I would ask when you come up to speak, if you are one of the speakers, that you please state your name for the record. And if it's anything like Van Drew, if you could spell it (laughter) that would help also.

SENATOR VAN DREW: You've got to hope it's that easy.

SENATOR BEACH: And if you have not signed in, we would appreciate you making sure that you sign in; and then what we'll do if you have an e-mail address, or if you would like to get updates as we proceed through the year with this Committee, we'd be more than happy to forward you updates.

Because of my age, I can't see too well, either. The first bill that we are discussing is a bill introduced by Senator Haines, and it's S-413. I will ask the Senator if he could just explain it briefly.

SENATOR HAINES: Thank you, Senator Beach.

And good morning, everyone. This is bill S-413, and it would provide free admission to State Parks and Forests for any retired member of the Armed Forces of the United States who is a resident of New Jersey, and also admission for their immediate family members. And immediate family members is defined in the statute to include spouse, child, stepchild, father, mother, mother-in-law, father-in-law, grandmother, grandfather, grandchild. You have to be a resident of the State of New Jersey. It would also provide free admission to the member and the immediate family members of active duty National Guards who have completed their basic training.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (Indiscernible)
a little louder.

SENATOR HAINES: I'm sorry; I'm very sorry for that. In fact, I'll stand up, like Senator Beach set the precedent.

For those who didn't hear-- This is my bill that provides free admission to State Parks and Forests for any retired member of the Armed Forces of the U.S. who is a resident of New Jersey, and their immediate family members. It also provides free admission to immediate family members of an active duty-- Field expediency, huh? (laughter) How about that field expediency? Want me to do it three times? (laughter)

Anyway-- Active duty in the National Guard who has completed basic training. And I think that the genesis of the bill is the fact that the economic times we find ourselves in, along with the fact that we're in wartime, and anything we can do to provide health and comfort to our men and women of the military and Armed Forces is the right thing to do. And I'm hopeful that the Senate will agree with me and recognize the contributions that you and your families have made. And we all know that the families are a big part of what the member itself does -- himself or herself. So we ought to thank Senator Beach for posting the bill, and I look forward to seeing it signed by the Governor someday.

SENATOR BEACH: And I'll ask Tracey to read the bill statement.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Thank you.

Senate Bill No. 413: This bill will provide free admission to State Parks and Forests for any retired member of the Armed Forces of the United States who is a resident of the state, and their immediate family

members. The bill would also extend free admission to immediate family members of an active member of the New Jersey National Guard who has completed initial active duty training. The bill was prefiled for introduction in the 2010-2011 session, pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review which has been performed.

SENATOR BEACH: Now, would anyone like to testify on this bill? Any comments? (no response)

All right, seeing none, we'll have the roll call vote, please.

SENATOR VAN DREW: I'll move it.

SENATOR BEACH: I'm sorry -- motion.

SENATOR VAN DREW: I'll move the bill.

SENATOR HAINES: Second.

SENATOR BEACH: Moved by Senator Van Drew; seconded by Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Thank you.

SENATOR BEACH: Roll call.

MS. PINO MURPHY: On the motion to release Senate Bill No. 413 -- Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Vice Chairman Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Beach.

SENATOR BEACH: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: The bill passes.

SENATOR BEACH: Thanks. (applause)

Congratulations, Senator.

SENATOR HAINES: Thanks.

SENATOR BEACH: I would also like to introduce a few people from Senator Frank Lautenberg's office -- Jonathan Chebra. Please stand, Jonathan. (applause) If I was as good looking as you, I'd jump up all the time. (laughter) And representing Senator Jim Whelan -- Kathleen Doles; Kathleen? Thank you, Kathleen. (applause)

The next bill is S-1026, Senator Connors' bill. Senator Connors asked me yesterday if we could pull this bill because he may be amending it, but we will take testimony today. Is there anyone who wishes to testify? Please come forward.

We'll read the statement before we get testimony.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Senate Bill No. 1026: This bill allows a corporation business tax and gross income tax credit for certain unreimbursed psychiatric treatment of veterans. The bill enables a taxpayer, under either tax, to take a credit for the value of qualified uncompensated psychiatric treatment provided to veterans in an amount of up to \$10,000. The amount of the credit provided will not exceed \$85 per hour of treatment. To be deemed eligible for a credit, such services must be medically necessary, performed by a psychiatrist, and undertaken without reimbursement. The credits created by this tax under the corporation business tax and gross income tax are mutually exclusive, such that no taxpayer may take a credit under both taxes for the provision of the same services. The credits afforded under this bill will be available on the privilege periods and taxable years commencing after the effective date. Senate Bill No. 1026 is identical to Assembly Bill No. 353 of 2010.

SENATOR BEACH: Nancy.

NANCY PINKIN: Thank you.

My name is Nancy Pinkin, P-I-N-K-I-N, and I am here today representing the New Jersey Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association. And we thank Senator Connors and the members of the Committee for taking up this issue.

As we know, there are still many veterans who are uninsured and still have difficulty getting care, so this will allow them to be able to do so. We just ask the sponsor, Senator Connors, if he would just make an inclusion of psychologists and psychiatric rehabilitation counselors as well to the bill, because many of the services that veterans need when they come back are not just the psychiatric treatment, but the counseling, the psychiatric rehabilitation. Psychiatric rehabilitation providers work with the clients to make sure that they get supported employment, supported housing -- help them not only to be able to get the mental health treatments, but also to be able to get the services that enable them to go back to the community, to get back into the workforce, get back into housing, and be able to support themselves and their families. And that's what helps them to reintegrate into the community, and with those additions that will help us to be able to provide those services.

So we thank you for that consideration, and if you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them.

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Nancy.

Any questions? (no response)

SENATOR VAN DREW: Budgets are tight in New Jersey; we've got one microphone. (laughter) What can I tell you?

SENATOR BEACH: One microphone.

SENATOR VAN DREW: And we borrowed that one from the VFW.

SENATOR BEACH: Is there anyone else who wishes to testify on this bill? (no response) All right. As we said, at the request of Senator Connors, we will be pulling this today, voting on it at a future date.

The next bill that we are considering is S-1869, and if-- I guess, what we'll do is, we'll read the statement.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Senate Bill No. 1869: This bill creates a New Jersey Honor Guard ribbon to be presented by the Governor in the name of the State of New Jersey to certain active members of the New Jersey National Guard, Honor Guard retiree members, and contracted civilian buglers who have served as Honor Guard team members in the National Guard, New Jersey Honor Guard program, and to Honor Guard personnel working at Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Cemetery. The team members and honor guard personnel serving through the National Guard, New Jersey Honor Guard Program deliver the military funeral honors deserved by those who served. It is only fitting and proper for the State of New Jersey to recognize them for their distinguished service.

There is a technical amendment to the bill to make it identical to Assembly Bill No. 1945.

SENATOR BEACH: And before we take testimony on this, at the present time it does not include our county or VSO Honor Guards -- our local guards -- but I did make an appointment to speak with the Assembly Chair, Jack Connors, and we are going to take up that issue. We'll follow up, and we'll see where we go with it. We'll speak with the

Governor, we'll speak with General Rieth, and we think that all of our honor guards -- because you all do such a wonderful service for our veterans -- need to be recognized. So we'll get back to you on that.

Now, is there anyone who wishes to testify? Red.

A L L E N R H O D E S: I'm Allen Rhodes; I'm the State Commander of the Military Order of the Cooties, which is the Honor Degree of the VFW. Not only do we do the pizza party and bingo, we also are the active members that do the funerals -- not with (indiscernible), but what the VFW had.

VFW Post 220 has 12 certified Honor Guard members who have been trained by the Honor Guard program out of Trenton. They have been certified and we're the first ones in the state -- there may be more soon developing -- and they should be included as an amendment, like you mentioned, Chairman, as VSO-certified and trained members, right after the bugler section that are contracted.

SENATOR BEACH: And yes sir, we do plan to look into that.

MR. RHODES: And the cost will be very nominal, because some of the members are already retired National Guard members entitled to the ribbon. Thank you.

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, sir.

Is there anyone else who wishes to testify on this bill? (no response)

Seeing none, do I have a motion?

SENATOR HAINES: So moved.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Second.

SENATOR BEACH: Senator Haines; seconded by Senator Van Drew. Roll call, please.

MS. PINO MURPHY: On the motion to release Senate Bill 1869, as amended -- Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Vice Chairman Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Beach.

SENATOR BEACH: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: The bill passes.

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you.

At this time, I'm going to ask Senator Van Drew if he would review what I believe is-- I'm sorry, I'm not paying attention. We have a separate bill that is congruent, so we'll ask for a motion for that. We have to do them separately.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Motion.

SENATOR BEACH: Motion, Senator Van drew.

SENATOR HAINES: Second.

SENATOR BEACH: Second, Senator Haines.

Roll call.

MS. PINO MURPHY: On the motion to release Assembly Bill 1945, which is identical to Senate Bill No. 1869 -- Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Vice Chairman Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Beach.

SENATOR BEACH: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: The bill passes.

SENATOR BEACH: So you can see who's really in charge up here. (laughter) Because I don't even pretend.

But at this time, I believe that we are here mainly to discuss Senator Van Drew's bills, and I would ask him to please explain, in some detail, what we're talking about.

Senator.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Thank you, Chairman.

I want to thank the Chairman and the Committee for being here today. We are truly honored to have you here with us. And I wanted to thank a few people before I forget, which is always dangerous, because there's a whole bunch of folks I'm going to forget; but particularly I did want to thank the Somers Point VFW for hosting this. I wanted to thank Commander Jim Donahue, Fred Vineyard, Rob Cozen, Bob McNulty, and a host of other people who helped to put this together. So the folks who I didn't mention, I'm remembering you -- we all remember you -- and we thank you for the work that you've done on this.

I also wanted to mention how important it is. Sometimes there is a disconnect between what happens at the State Capital and what happens at home. And that's why it's so good that the Chairman has agreed to have this meeting here, because the Legislature should be a living, breathing organization that connects to its constituency, and this is what it's about. An example of that has been the Cremation Bill, which was passed through the Legislature. And for those who weren't familiar with it, it is shameful to say, but in the past there were many veterans,

unfortunately, after they passed, who were unclaimed -- they didn't have any family, they didn't have anybody who knew about them or cared about them. But they were men and women who served with honor, and nobody took care of them. And it's shameful to say, but they were in the back rooms of crematories, or funeral parlors, or nursing homes -- literally nobody knowing that they were there. Their cremains were there, but they were never disposed honorably and decently as they should.

It was different individuals throughout the State of New Jersey that made us so aware of that issue; particularly, here in Somers Point, Fred Vineyard. And so many other folks truly -- Bob Frolow -- made us really aware of the issue and told us how important it was. We got that legislation done in record time. And it wasn't just because of the Senators or the members of the House; it was because of the people who lived in the State of New Jersey who understood how important it was, because frankly we didn't know about it. They did, and the veterans told us about it, and we got it done. And today, I don't know where Fred is; he told me the number before--

F R E D V I N E Y A R D: (indiscernible)

SENATOR VAN DREW: How many? Fred, how many veterans have gotten the proper military funeral?

MR. VINEYARD: This week we did 17.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Seventeen; 17 individual human beings who have finally been treated with the honor that they deserve. So it does make a difference that you're here. (applause)

MR. VINEYARD: Hey Jeff, just hold on. I just want to mention one thing. One veteran was on the (indiscernible) -- WW I veteran. He sat on a shelf for 53 years.

SENATOR VAN DREW: So you folks are making a difference, and we thank you for that.

MR. VINEYARD: (Indiscernible); you guys did.

SENATOR VAN DREW: That's exactly right.

And we want to make another difference. For years -- for many years, for as long as I can remember, what I'll call *down in deep South Jersey* folks have spoken about the need for more health care for our veterans. And it is no surprise to anybody who is from the area -- whether you're in Cape May County, Atlantic County, Cumberland County, Ocean County, just to name a few of them. And obviously there are other southern New Jersey counties as well, including the counties that our good senators are here from today -- Burlington and Camden -- where sometimes they have to travel across state lines or to North Jersey on difficult trips in order to get a minimum amount of health care. And in real words what that means today is, this morning as we woke up on this beautiful day there are veterans who live here who are preparing to take a trip sometimes of two hours or more, depending on where they have to go, and they travel all the way to the location, they see someone for 10 or 15 minutes, and they travel all the way back. Sometimes they are World War II veterans -- this is a really difficult trip. Sometimes they band together and try to get a group of them so someone can drive and someone can keep an eye on the road. And sometimes they don't go because the trip is so long and they're so tired of it, and the reality is they don't get the same level of health care as people do

throughout the rest of this state. That's wrong. And that's why we're here. The veterans who live in deep South Jersey are every bit as noble, every bit as decent, every bit as worthy of having the health care that folks do in Wilmington, Delaware; or Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; or in East Orange, New Jersey. (applause)

So what we're going to discuss today is, do we need the health care? And you're all here just to, hopefully say, "Yes, we do." Please don't surprise me. (laughter) And to give us-- And I respectfully ask if the testimony could be very brief. Three of the Senators and myself we have another engagement in a little over an hour, so we have about an hour and a half to do this. And we would love your testimony, and if the proof is there, and I believe it will be -- we're going to move pieces of legislation with the pleasure of the Chairman. And the one piece of legislation would encourage the Federal Government to do the right thing and establish a South Jersey veterans' hospital -- and that's a good thing; not quite as important as the other piece of legislation -- the other piece of legislation would establish a task force, which will be a working group -- a real group -- of people from the House -- of Assembly people, of Senators, of people who are veterans in the business world, of folks who are veterans who have served in public policy, of appointments by the Governor, of appointments by the Senate President, appointments made by the Speaker of the House as well. So we will have a broad range of individuals who will serve on this task force -- 17 in total -- to represent the true spectrum of experience out there. We will meet once that legislation is established into law and we will establish a Chairman of that task force, and we will establish the members of the task force. We will meet in every county we can and every county

that welcomes us -- and I know that will be Atlantic and Cumberland and Salem and Ocean, and hopefully Burlington and Camden and Gloucester -- wherever they want us -- we're going to assemble information, we're going to assemble statistics, we're going to hear testimony, and we're going to prove that the need is there.

Quite frankly, the VA has not been as supportive or productive in this process as they should be, and this is not about bureaucracy, and it's not about covering our butt; it's about not just giving speeches on Veterans Day and Memorial Day, it's about truly taking care of our veterans when they come home. That's why we're here today; that's why we want to establish the task force. And again that's why I thank, so much, Senator Beach, and Senator Haines for being here, because I know they have busy schedules. And out of respect for them, the only thing again I could ask is, whatever your testimony is, it can be as brief as, "This is who I am; I support that legislation; I support a South Jersey veterans hospital." We really do need to be done in about an hour and a half.

So thank you, Chairman.

SENATOR BEACH: At this time, I would ask Tracey if she will read the statements for both bills.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Senate Bill No. 1189: This bill establishes the New Jersey Veterans Hospital Task Force. The purpose of the Task Force is to study, and evaluate, and make recommendations related to the construction and operation of a veterans' healthcare facility in southern New Jersey. The Task Force will be comprised of 17 members. It will be the duty of the Task Force to estimate the capital, operational, and administration expenses associated with establishing a new veterans'

healthcare facility in southern New Jersey; or contracting with an existing healthcare facility to provide medical services to veterans. It will obtain and review statistical data on the number of veterans residing in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties, and the number of veterans receiving medical services at hospitals within those counties in the past five years in order to determine a central location for a veterans' healthcare facility. It will also determine the size and staffing levels necessary for a veterans' healthcare facility to provide a full range of primary care, and medical and surgical subspecialty care to eligible veterans. It will review various methods of financing a veterans' healthcare facility through public, private, and public/private partnership financing system; and investigate opportunities for the State to enter into collaborative agreements with the Federal Government to ensure the most efficient use of funds and resources related to the operation of a veterans' healthcare facility. The task force is to report to the Governor and the Legislature no later than 12 months after its initial meeting. Senate Bill No. 1189 is identical to Assembly Bill No. 845 of 2010.

Senate Resolution 28: This Senate Resolution urges the President and the Congress of the United States to immediately enact legislation establishing a veterans' regional medical center in Cumberland County, New Jersey. Veterans from southern New Jersey should not have to travel long distances either to northern New Jersey or out of state to receive in-patient medical care. Due to the pressing need for a veterans regional medical center in southern New Jersey and the central location of Cumberland County, the President and Congress are urged to immediately

enact legislation establishing such a facility in Cumberland County. Senate Resolution No. 28 is identical to Assembly Resolution No. 22 of 2010.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Chairman, the only difference is we are going to ask to amend that to not say Cumberland County; but it's actually going to say South Jersey, southern New Jersey veterans' hospital.

SENATOR BEACH: And we're going to add Ocean County, with your permission.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Absolutely -- and Ocean County.

Just so folks know, real briefly, and then we'll move on here -- Ocean County, particularly, is underserved as well. It has the highest number of veterans, a huge senior population, and when the VA does its statistics they don't include them with the South Jersey piece. They actually include them with North Jersey -- they're supposed to go to East Orange and Essex County. So one of the reasons that we don't show the need that we truly have down here is because they split a very significant part of Southern New Jersey away -- which is Ocean County -- and we want to change that.

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Senator.

At this time we'll begin testimony. And I would please remind you to state your name for the record as you come up to speak; and spell your last name. Thank you.

First we have Rob Cozen

R O B C O Z E N: Good morning; my name is Rob Cozen, C-O-Z-E-N. I'm the Second Vice Commander of the AMVETS Somers Point Post 911.

First of all, I want to thank Chairman Beach, Senator Haines, and especially Senator Van Drew. I don't think there has ever been a

community -- forget South Jersey -- in the entire country that has the support of a State Senator like we do in Senator Van Drew. He has always been here for us (applause). He deserves (indiscernible) our thanks and recognition. So Jeff, thank you so much.

Just a slight omission. When you were talking about the fact that some of our senior and active veterans have to take a bus to go sometimes to Wilmington, Delaware, one thing you neglected to say is that nine times out of 10, sometimes 10 times out of 10, the bus doesn't have toilet facilities; it's an old bus. You know, you take a bus to go to New York City to go to a show, you have music, you have the toilets, you have refreshments -- we don't have any of that for our veterans. You know, you mentioned the fact that this is the largest group that you've seen so far. Don't look at numbers -- look at the faces of the people who are out here. These are mostly people who are senior citizens, men and women who went to war -- World War II, Vietnam and afterwards. They deserve not only the gratitude, but the respect and the recognition; and the way to do it is by giving us a medical facility here in South Jersey.

I'm a prime example of it; I have tinnitus from during my service. I have to go to Wilmington, Delaware, just to get an audiology exam. And that's ridiculous. We should be able to have something here in South Jersey.

So again, I'm sure that there will be other veterans' groups that are coming up, but I'm sure that I speak for the veterans' association in Somers Point for, number one, thanking you so much for being here and listening to us. We hope that our words are going to be heard and that there will be good action.

But again, to all of you, and especially to Senator Van Drew, thank you for everything that you do for us here in Somers Point. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Rob; and all of us up here agree, and we hope that there are veterans from Burlington County that will even things out with Senator Van Drew. (laughter) And certainly from Camden County-- (laughter)

Next speaker is Marco Smigliani.

Thanks, Marco

MARCO POLO SMIGLIANI: Thank you.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Marco Polo Smigliani, and I'm a veteran -- Vietnam veteran -- and a veterans' advocate.

On behalf of all veterans, we welcome our distinguished guests. We have been eagerly awaiting this meeting with the hope that our discussion today will further enlighten you to the vast medical needs of a veterans' population and to the hardship that is imposed upon them as they are forced to travel great distances to satisfy those needs.

We are greatly encouraged by the fact that there has been established a military veterans Senate Committee, and we anticipate an open line of communication between our representatives and the veterans. I need a nice applause for doing that, for getting the Committee, please. (applause)

We look forward to working together, organizing and disseminating information pertaining to our veterans. And most of all, we look ahead with great anticipation to the reality of having a veterans' hospital in this, our South Jersey area. For too long, we here in South

Jersey have been the forgotten ones. Until now communication and medical services have been woefully inadequate. Many of our veterans feel abandoned and forgotten. Your presence here today gives all of us a reassurance that now we have a voice: a voice of connection to Trenton and Washington. A voice that will represent all of us who served this great nation proudly. A voice that will speak with conviction and clarity about our needs for better accessible health care.

To that end, we ask you today -- as we discuss the formation of a veterans' hospital in the future -- may we also discuss the possibility, for the interim period, of consolidating additional medical services in either Ventnor or Vineland. In that way our vets will only have to travel to Philadelphia or Delaware for hospital treatment.

This would alleviate a great deal of distress to all those veterans who are forced to take a bus to Delaware -- a bus trip which spans the entire day from early morning to the end of the day, regardless of the time of your appointment. It is a grueling trip, most especially for older veterans, with no bathroom access on the bus and hour after hour waiting. It is an undignified, disrespectful way to treat men who deserve much more. As a Vietnam veteran and a veterans' advocate, I strongly support Congressman Dan Lipinski's belief that as a nation we have an obligation to prioritize the veterans' healthcare system. In his words, "On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind."

For too long, too many veterans all across this great nation of ours have been left behind by the very government that promised to care for them. We are deeply grateful to you for your efforts in establishing a

veterans' Committee. We are deeply grateful to you for your earnest endeavors to provide us with comprehensive, accessible health care; and we are deeply grateful to you for honoring those who so proudly served their country and preserved our freedoms, and who, as I mentioned before, deserve much, much more.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America -- probably the greatest country upon the face of this earth. (applause) And I wasn't born here, so I know.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman; thank you very much.

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Marco.

Our next speaker -- Robert McNulty, Senior.

R O B E R T E. M c N U L T Y Sr.: Boy, am I not known for short speeches. (laughter) I promise you this will be different.

Robert McNulty Sr., M-c-N-U-L-T-Y. I'm here on behalf of the Atlantic County Veterans' Advisory Board. I have passed out some information for you to please take back, review it, and to share with your colleagues. I'm going to go over that ever so briefly.

The first is a map that outlines the layout of Veterans' Integrated Service Network 4 -- they provide our care. You can see the seven southern counties are but a small portion of a very large system. It's not hard for us to kind of get lost in the shuffle in terms of budgeting and services. That has got to change.

On the report itself, page 1 through 3, covers what we're doing here in Atlantic County in regards to the clinic -- or what we're trying to do -- as well as a healthcare facility of a larger nature, whether it be a super

clinic or a hospital. We don't care how you define it, something needs to happen. It needs to happen regionally.

Pages 4 through 8 discuss healthcare access and options in South Jersey, as compared to other parts of the nation. For me to say we're being underserved is, in fact, an understatement.

Page 9 covers the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and the impact that it has on South Jersey. When you look and see out of the billions of dollars -- \$787 billion -- they directed \$40,000 to South Jersey. And this is to do four surveys, of \$10,000 each, to see if it's viable to do solar lighting at Fort Dix clinic, the Cape May clinic -- both of them on Federal property -- and then the two Federal graveyards. And that's the extent of it. All of that bailout money, that's the extent of it for veterans' services in South Jersey. That seems to be coming up a little short.

Page 12 is Public Law 108-170. A number of years ago, at the National level, they approved legislation to do the kind of study that we're talking about doing with the Task Force. It was passed, it was signed -- we're still waiting. There's no point in our Federal government passing legislation for the VA to do something, and then for them not to do it. It wasn't done -- you haven't seen it, I haven't seen it, I can't refer to it, it does not exist. But, in fact, it was passed.

Pages 13 and 14 outline a number of concerns that we have that we think reflect the various needs of the veterans who we deal with on a regular basis. And pages 15 and 16, there is an article by an agency that refers to the number of veterans in 2008 who died due to lack of health services. And that is a sin on our nation -- that is an absolute shame.

Please read the material. Please refer to it as you need and go along. And please share that with your counterparts in both the Assembly and the Senate.

Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Mr. McNulty.

I'd also like to mention that most of our South Jersey congressmen did contact us and let us know that they were in session today. They certainly would all have been here to share this morning with us.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Chairman, can I make a comment real quick?

SENATOR BEACH: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Concerning the bus: The attitude of the VA (indiscernible) bus is a trip. We didn't have a handicap bus until this young lady's husband passed away (referring to other audience member) -- Juanita (indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Thank you, Bob. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Juanita.

Our next testimony -- Jim Edward Whitehead.

J A M E S E D W A R D W H I T E H E A D: Good morning, and thank you. It's an honor to be before this distinguished group of State Senators, and, indeed, to be before this enormous distinguished group of veterans -- men and women -- because America's women have made quite a bit of contribution to the military forces.

My name is Jimmy Whitehead. I'm an Atlantic City veteran from Washington, D.C. My father was a veteran who just passed away. He

was a Vietnam Veteran; he was a 20-year Agent Orange cancer survivor. So I have the first-hand experience of how important it is for veterans to have good quality health care.

I'm here to represent a group in Atlantic County -- in Pleasantville, New Jersey -- which wants to develop a facility which not only provides health care rehabilitation, eye and dental care, but we formed a unique triangle of support which includes partnering with -- helping homeless veterans, men and women. Because in back of this building there is a fabulous facility called The Gates where they're going to create for homeless veterans to have a place that's affordable. And we're also partnering with a non-profit organization called Community Quest, which is an incredible non-profit organization, so that we can be not only strategic in providing health services, but the first thing we've got to do is raise the money. And the way we see raising money is not just from the taxpayers, but also bring the private sector initiatives into this picture so that we can go and tap the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Warren Buffet Foundation, and some of these other foundations that have money, that are private sector dollars, that they want to put into community programs for veterans.

So I'm here just to say thank you very much for your incredible leadership. God bless you all. And keep Pleasantville in mind, because it's so conveniently located to mass public transportation. It's about 15 minutes from here; it's less than that from Atlantic City. And it's a city that is on the verge of growing, with a lot of dollars from CREDA and other organizations going there. So if we could figure out how to work under the leadership of Senator Van Drew and the other distinguished Senators, and

look at Pleasantville as well as other locations, I think that we could get there together -- and not just with tax dollars, but help the veterans as well as the homeless veterans.

So thank you and God bless you all. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: This one microphone reminds me of a comment Colonel Bancroft makes frequently about adopting, overcoming, and improvising. (laughter)

Our next speaker is Joseph Orlando.

J O S E P H A. O R L A N D O: My name is Joseph Orlando, O-R-L-A-N-D-O. I am the Veterans of Foreign Wars' Cape May County District 17 Commander.

We are the south-most community in New Jersey, and we do have a volunteer service that our veterans drive other veterans to the VA hospital in Elsmere, and also Philadelphia. The minimum drive we have from Cape May County is 178 miles to the Elsmere home, and also to Philadelphia it's about 200 miles. We do this strictly with our volunteer services. There's also Cape May County Fare Free that does transport veterans also.

The story I'd like to tell you is about one veteran who I had the opportunity to take, who said he had a meeting with a physician that was about a half an hour long at the Philadelphia Hospital. This veteran did not drive. He had to leave his house in Wildwood, New Jersey, at 5:00 in the morning to make a 1 p.m. appointment with the physician, and didn't get home until 8:00 that night. And this is not worthy of some type of service -- we shouldn't turn our back to. We need to have a hospital in South Jersey to take care of our veterans.

And know that you have my sponsorship as the Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and all our membership. And I really do thank you for all you're doing to try to get us the necessary care that we need in South Jersey for our veterans.

Thank you very much. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Joe.

Our next speaker -- Walt Sudol.

WALT SUDOL: Good morning; my name is Walt Sudol, S-U-D-O-L. I am a member of the DVA and the VFW Somers Point.

Jeff, I've known for many years -- the first time I saw him he came to my door when he was campaigning for election of some small office. But he hasn't changed much in all those years. (laughter)

SENATOR VAN DREW: I've got a lot more grey hair, buddy.

MR. SUDOL: Anyway, I've been going to the VA hospital for a long time -- I've got service-connected cancer and diabetes. And they treat me very well. It's a long ride, I get up like 5:00 in the morning to get there so I can find parking. It's very important when you're there. And I get my appointments done. But when I take the van up there, like I did last year when I had a broken leg, it's kind of tortuous. And you get up there and you only have four hours to get your job done. They didn't have time to put a cast on me -- it took nine days before I had a cast put on me. I was walking around with a splint, but it wasn't a cast, but it was a minor bone -- it was just a tibia in the leg. It took a while, but that ride -- that ride in that van was really bumpy, and older folks -- I don't know how they stand it. But Wilmington, Delaware, does take excellent care of you when you've got appointments. But when I went there for an emergency, it was a little

tough. I didn't have the time or the-- I didn't have anybody to back me up.

That's a true story and I'm not running for anything.
(laughter) (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Walt.

Lou Green.

L O U G R E E N: Thank you for providing this meeting and this opportunity to hear the voices of our veterans, and our family members, and interested citizens.

I'm a Korean War veteran, and I'm a member of the Hamilton Veterans' Advisory Board. I'm an officer in the Sampson Air Force Base Veterans Organizations, and a member of the State of New Jersey Presidents and Commanders Organization.

I'm a self-made veterans' advocate for the past 16 years, as well as I'm a VA outpatient for the past 16 years. It's about time a government department considers care of our veterans, instead of a word that I hear quite often called *cost*. A major problem presently on the bus system is that a family member cannot accompany a veteran on the bus -- only veterans. And there are many instances where veterans who need a caregiver -- whether is be the wife, or family member -- cannot go with that veteran. He or she must use their own facilities to get to Wilmington, Delaware; or to Philadelphia.

Recently the U.S. Congress passed a law -- it's S-1963 -- which is to review -- here we go again with this review -- it's a two-year program that devoted \$5 million for the review to look at the rural areas of our country as to how they are treating our veterans. This particular bill was

effective this year and it runs for two years. There is also a bill that was submitted by Congressman LoBiondo which is to build, also, A medical center; as well as the possibility to attach a separate unit in some of the medial centers such as Shore Memorial, and AtlantiCare Medical, where we could have an addition to their hospital to care for our veterans in South Jersey.

Presently, statistically, about 8,000 veterans have been denied VA health care, and the reason that they're being denied is because they make too much money. It's shameful. They have come out of World War II, come out of Korea, come out of Vietnam and other areas of our past, and accumulated something in their lifetime, and now they're being punished and they say, "I'm sorry, you make too much money, we can't take you in." And we always question: When I and many of our other veterans, who either volunteered, were drafted, or activated -- I don't remember that question of how much money do you earn, and that you may be denied entry into military service. (applause)

I confronted a veteran official from Washington at a local meeting not too long ago, and he was talking, again, about the cost and how we can cut down and save on personnel, and various types of cost-saving procedures. And after his speech I got up -- and there was something like 30-different representatives of veteran organizations there -- and I said, "It's a strange thing that we're talking constantly of cost, and when we were in Korea, I found out that a bullet cost 58 cents, a hand grenade was \$1.58. So if I shot 15 rounds and I only killed one of our enemy, then I cost the government 14 times 58 cents. Or if I threw a hand grenade -- which was \$1.58 at that time -- and I only killed five or 10, then I should have killed

10 or 20 for the cost of that grenade.” I mean, that’s the asinine evaluation, and I realize there’s a certain sarcasm to it. But that brings to the question, again, of cost versus care.

Right now, in the United States, 550,000 veterans have been denied health care because of income threshold. That was a policy -- not a law -- that became effective in 2003. So I say to the U.S. veterans Affairs and the Congress, “Shame, shame on you.”

And thank you, thank you, for whatever you can do for our veterans. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Lou.

Our next speaker, Richard Pitman.

R I C H A R D A. P I T M A N: Good morning. My name is Rick Pittman, P-I-T-M-A-N. It’s a pleasure to meet with all of you here today. I work for Shore Memorial Hospital. And, as I say, it’s a pleasure to meet with you to thank you for what you’re doing, but it is an honor to stand in a room with these people. (applause) These folks have been on the front lines, signed the check, and I’m also proud to be a Vietnam veteran myself.

And I want to thank you for what you’re doing, encouraging all of these efforts, but especially on the Task Force that’s going to be looking into this -- the committee that’s going to be evaluating it. I strongly encourage you to look at dealing with existing hospitals and healthcare services that are more than willing to see if there is any possible way we could provide these services.

Shore Memorial Hospital stands ready to do a pilot project working with this Committee or you folks any time. That makes services available almost immediately in the most cost-effective manner possible,

and we could come up with a pilot project that could be moved to other hospitals throughout the state. (applause) And if you want to ease access, that will ease it in a hurry.

Now, I just want to make another comment, because I just think it is so intolerable that we ask veterans to ride great distances in buses -- poorly equipped buses -- to get health services. And I want to just remind you from a clinical perspective, that includes radiation and chemotherapy patients. And if any of you have had a family member who has been through that you know that is a cumulative debilitating process. It knocks you out. The bus ride attached to that is intolerable. It also includes dialysis, where you go three times a week until the end or until you get a transplant. That is also an exhausting procedure. Those services are available locally; let's open them up for our vets. If there's anything Shore Memorial can do to help you with that, we stand ready to do it.

Thank you for being here, and thank you for your service.
(applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Mr. Pitman.

Our next speaker, Bernie Epworth.

B E R N I E E P W O R T H: Morning, Committee.

I'm the State Commander of the Jewish War Veterans.

Rick, we need more guys like you around the state, because we want to get this thing up and running. It's what you did, Jim, with Cooper Hospital down in Camden when you opened up a satellite there. I think if we create-- Before we'd ever get an edifice built by the VA, let's take the short steps and try to get partnerships with the various medical centers that

I am sure have the facilities available to bring in, and staff, and house the kind of people we need for the kind of treatments that are out there.

Now, while we're doing that, it's a stop-gap, and we're giving everybody the opportunity of service while they're building what we really need down here in South Jersey.

Senator, I think we really have to get this Ocean County group as part of this community. This is paramount.

One other thing that's come out of this meeting loud and clear, in addition to medical care, is transportation. And we have to work as a group, all of us, to see when we can go out there and solicit to get a couple of buses that will be appropriate for the transportation of our veterans to where they have to go, until we can fill some of these stop-gap -- until we can create these stop-gap measures. If we get out there, we start hitting the bricks, we're reinforcing what they have to do and we will make it happen. Guys, they're not going to turn us down for the service that we gave. All we have to do is ask.

So please, men, I think we have to get together as veterans, make our needs known. Let them understand. There's a-- Chairman, as you know, there's a big depot on Admiral Wilson Boulevard that has a ton of busses that they charter out. I'm sure we could probably make a deal for a used bus that has lavatory facilities. It's an over-the-road bus, proper shocks and the like, to give a comfortable ride. What I think we should do is get some groups together to make this thing happen, and I for one would be glad to serve on your committee to help on this Task Force.

But at any rate, thank you for what you're doing. And I think there's a short-gap way of breaching this void, and that is with the help of our local hospitals. Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Bernie, thank you. And firsthand, thank you for what you do for our veterans every day. I appreciate it.

If you would indulge me for just a second: I saw a young man come in, William Brown. Are you still here, William? Yes, please stand.

I just want to tell you a little bit about William. William is the founder of the veterans' education group at Rutgers University. And this is a young man who is a Navy SEAL -- very proud to say -- and has really come home from several tours in Iraq and Afghanistan to take the lead for veterans' issues for our young men and women who are returning. And I just wanted to say thank you, William. And yesterday the full Senate actually voted on one of his bills to-- He came to me, we talked about it, and what the bill does is it requires all of our colleges and universities, along with the Division of Military and Veterans Affairs, to put links on all of the websites so that they can explore educational opportunities even before they get home. And William, I just want to publicly thank you; thank you for coming yesterday. And he actually voted on the floor of the Senate for his bill. Thank you, William. (applause)

Our next speaker is Phil Uecker.

PHILIP UECKER: My name's Philip Uecker; I'm the past State Commandant for the Marine Corps League, and I'm also past Chairman of the Advisory Board for Galloway Township.

We had some outstanding speakers already, going into a lot of the details, so I'm not going to go into any of that. I just want to point out

one instance: I'm a 40 percent combat veteran -- disabled veteran -- and just this week, Wednesday, I had to travel to Elsmere. It took me approximately an hour-and-a-half to get there. I was there for 20 minutes, and then I had an hour-and-a-half drive back. Monday I have to go back again, and I'll be there all day on Monday, though. But it's just to show you the need to have something a little bit closer here; that that ride is uncalled for. I had a three-hour drive -- hour and a half there, hour and a half back -- that really is not needed. I'm lucky; I'm at least healthy enough that the ride doesn't bother me, but I know a lot of the veterans here that the ride is the worst part of the whole thing. Once you get to Elsmere, they treat you terrific. It's getting there that is the problem. Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Phil.

Our next speaker, Peter W. Vanace.

P E T E R W. V A N A C E, M.D.: Vanace. (indicating pronunciation)

SENATOR BEACH: Vanace.

DR. VANACE: Thank you for the invitation to speak.

I'm one of the old guys here -- I'm a World War II veteran of the Air Force. I also took advantage of the G.I. Bill of Rights and became a physician. I've spent 40 years in practice with pediatrics and handicapped children throughout southern New Jersey and Pennsylvania, and have devoted an awful lot of time to the study of delivery of medical services.

I have a number of chronic illnesses and have spent numerous hours traveling to physicians who I have chosen; I have the ability to choose. I have experience in administrative medicine -- I ran the municipal

hospital in Camden, New Jersey. I also was the Director of the Children's Seashore House here in Atlantic City.

The only reason I'm asking to talk today is I am in full support of care for veterans, not just a medical facility. I go to the hospital in Philadelphia. I sat for hours to receive a prescription for a medication that is very expensive. I am very discouraged with the services of the Veterans Administration, medically. I think that every veteran in the United States who served should be entitled to free medical care in any part of this nation. They should be able to choose their own physician and their own care module. It is not necessary to build additional VA hospitals. I think that every veteran should be -- in their own community -- provided free medical care for any service they need. I think we are entitled to that, without question. I see no need to travel to Philadelphia, to Camden, or any other place. If you are there, you should have a card that entitles you to see any physician that you want who has the experience to take care of your medical needs. (applause)

I'm sick and tired of the President of the United States, and the Senate, and House of Representatives apologizing for us as Americans, and particularly, veterans. I will never apologize for my service, but I also think I'm entitled to some care of my condition that does not cost money that I can't afford, or physicians or nurses who do not care about me. I want to pick my caretakers and I don't want to have to travel 100 miles to do that; it's unnecessary. (applause)

You don't have to apologize to anybody for your service, okay? And you don't have to pay for any expensive service. Any politician who

gets free medical care I think deserves it, but I also think I deserve it also.
(laughter) (applause)

You should not go to any facility and sit for three hours for an appointment of 10 minutes with someone who does not care. They are working for a Federal agency and they are not working for you. You have to ask for care, and demand it. Please -- you served your country.

I would love to be on this Task Force (laughter) (applause) but I will fight for one thing -- I want a gold card (laughter). A gold card with my name on it and my service affiliation. And I want to stand proudly and walk into any facility in this country that I want to and ask for the care I need. And I'm not going to pay for it. I don't have to pay for it. I served in the Air Force -- 33 missions. Unfortunately, I never got a Purple Heart. I never was a prisoner of war which entitled me to free care. My brother died as a pilot in the 15th Air Force in Italy. He had-- I asked the Federal government to provide a pass for him -- we cannot find his body -- a burial spot in Arlington. They think I'm crazy. I said, "I would love to be buried at Arlington." Well, I don't qualify. But any Senator, House of Representative of this country can be buried in Arlington -- did you know that? If they had a spot for my brother, I would love to be buried in the same plot. "Are you crazy? We don't have room at Arlington for you." I think that's awful.

I would love to volunteer for your committee, but again, I wouldn't necessarily fight for a new veterans' hospital. I want a little gold card. (laughter) (applause) Thank you very much.

SENATOR BEACH: You're welcome.

Doctor, you shouldn't keep things inside. You really need to let them out. (laughter) It's not good for you.

Senator Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: I-- Just to clarify a couple of things. Just so you know: The Senators up here, we don't get to go to Arlington. We're lucky if we get the old parking lot next to the State House. They might bury us there. (laughter)

And as far as the Task Force -- this would be all the types of things that we look at. In all honesty, it is a Federal issue, so we're not going to be able to say we're going to completely change the system. Certainly that's a worthy conversation we can get into it, and that discussion's been had about just literally giving people a card so they can access any health care at any hospital or any doctor's office in America. However, what we can look at through the Task Force is partnerships such as was mentioned with Shore Memorial Hospital, or ACMC, or any other facility -- adding an addition on, adding a wing on, using the existing facility, establishing a clinic within the facility. We've done some of that already, and we can certainly do more of it. What we're going to look at, we're going to be realistic. What's most cost-effective but, at the same time, what can we really accomplish

You know, we would love -- some of us would love a stand-alone, beautiful facility right here. If that's not going to happen, though, we need to get some more service -- real service -- here. Often people will say, "Well, there's a clinic in Cape May, and there's a clinic in Ventnor, and there's something in Vineland at the Veterans Home, at the Soldiers Home," but the reality is, other than some of the most minor care, you

always have to go to either Philadelphia or Wilmington or to, in some cases, East Orange. We can do better than that. So we're going to look at all of this.

Thank you, Chairman. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Richard (*sic*), to follow up on that: What we did in Camden County is we met with Cooper Hospital and the VA, and we put an annex right at Cooper Hospital. We're trying to work on expanding that into a one-stop shop for all medical needs, but we're not quite there. And the pushback is a little bit on the VA side, quite honestly, not Cooper Hospital. So that's also something that this Task Force can take a look at. (applause)

Our next speaker is Richard Van Dyk.

RICHARD VAN DYK: Good morning.

First of all, I'd like to say thank you for hearing us out, and being here this morning.

My name is Richard Van Dyk, that's V-A-N D-Y-K. I live in Manahawkin, New Jersey, which is Stanford Township, southern Ocean County. I'm the one who's stuck right in the middle of everything. It takes me 40, 45 minutes to get to Ventnor; it takes me 40, 45 minutes to get to Bricktown; it takes me two hours to get to Wilmington; two hours to get to Lyons; two hours to get to Philly. So I'm the one you're looking at who's stuck in the middle there. I prefer going to Wilmington because it's a beautiful hospital, it's well-kept, well-maintained. The problem is, is lots of times when I go there, I take that two-hour ride, I get there to find out that the doctor who I'm supposed to be seeing that day called in sick. They don't call you and let you know if the doctor's sick or not going to be there

that day. It's happened a number of times. I take that two-hour ride down, find out the doctor's not there, and take the two-hour ride back home. I just lost four hours.

Having a hospital closer to us-- I live within a half-a-mile of a civilian hospital -- Southern Ocean County Hospital. I use the VA, as I'm 100 percent disabled. I like going to the VA system. I think they treat you very well. Just, I would like to have one closer, or some facility closer, that could handle both of the things that have to be done for us veterans. Most of us are getting older now. We're in our 60s, 70s, all of us Vietnam veterans. What I would like to see is a hospital in southern Ocean County, not so much for us, but the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who are coming behind us. They're the ones who are going to need this facility a lot more than we are. It's hard for us to get to the facilities, but you have a lot more men and women coming into the VA now. They're going to need it a lot more.

That's all I'd like to say. Thank you very much. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Richard.

Our next speaker, Kenneth Weinstein.

K E N N E T H W E I N S T E I N: Good morning. My name is Kenneth Weinstein. I am the owner of The Gates at Somers Point, which is located just behind the VFW.

My reason for speaking with you this morning is to agree that a local hospital is so desperately needed here. Shore Memorial is ideal. We are getting now-- In the last four weeks we've already signed up almost 14 apartment rentals for permanent housing, along with our partnership with Community Quest which will provide all kinds of social services, including

helping to find jobs, employment, etc. So we have what is known as the pilot project, the perfect model, that the VA has asked for. And with Shore Memorial just a few blocks away, and the idea that we also have Jimmy Whitehead, who has got a planned facility in Pleasantville, a state-of-the-art-type facility that they plan on building-- With everyone's help here, we expect to fill up all 202 apartments for the veterans who are coming back from overseas, their families -- since we have two-bedroom apartments, great school system here in Somers Point. And the need that we have is just to find out how Senator Van Drew can step up to the plate, get this annex -- either at Shore Memorial -- quickly, because we have two women veterans who are going to need help. They're moving in in the next few days and they do not want to be the only women on the bus going down to Wilmington.

And I thank you, and I thank every one in this room for the service that they've given to this great country, and we hope that the President finally turns around and says, "Here is what we're going to do today" -- not tomorrow, not with all of these committees and subcommittees and everything. We're going to start with a couple of annexes immediately. We are going to get those VASH vouchers out of HUD immediately. People want to move into southern Jersey. They're veterans, they're entitled to it, and they're wonderful, wonderful people coming back from overseas.

Thank you very much for your time. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Kenneth.

Kerrie Kelly. Oh, grand entrance.

KERRIE KELLY: Like that?

Thank you. I'll be brief. My name is Kerrie Kelly. I'm Senior Vice President of Finance and Program Expansion for Community Quest. And we are partnering with the town of Somers Point to provide permanent housing for veterans in Somers Point. And I have to say, I'm very proud to be working with the town of Somers Point -- they're very proactive with the vets, and their vet organizations are very, very supportive of them. They've really stepped up to work together with us.

But I do hear often and frequently from the veterans the difficulty in transporting to the healthcare facilities -- the ride that they have to take. And it's a concern and we need to do something about it, to change that.

Thanks for your time. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thanks, Kerrie.

Dan Callahan.

DAN CALLAHAN: Good morning, how are you? My name is Dan Callahan.

I've been listening to many of the same complaints I've had, but I just want to make two points here: One is that I finally heard somebody mention that there is a hospital called Lyons Hospital that's not so far from you, gentlemen and ladies. I've heard about East Orange. But I moved down here about five years ago from a town called Cranford up in northern New Jersey, and I was approximately 28 miles from Lyons, and approximately 15 miles from East Orange -- both of them VA facilities. So it didn't take me any time at all.

Now I've moved down here to Cape May; my son says I've moved as far south as I possibly can in New Jersey, and that's true. It's 148

miles from my house up in Cranford down to where I've now moved down into North Cape May. So here we are, in Cranford, two VA facilities within a half-hour of one another. I'm down here, and I have to go all the way up to Wilmington to get a hearing aid. I go to Wilmington, I get a hearing aid, I come home two hours later and the thing doesn't work. I now have to call and make an appointment. "We'll see you in a month." Yes. So now, I show up again -- 10 minutes for a two-hour ride -- come back down, and the thing still doesn't work; it's too tight, whatever. And by the way, I'm glad we have this thing here (referring to microphone), because where I'm sitting I don't always hear you fellows, because I don't have it in at the moment. Guess why?

So there is an issue here that if this facility -- a facility was close by -- and me, from my point of view, I don't care whether it's a hospital or a clinic, just something that allows me to get the hearing aid fixed so I can hear.

I'm hoping that you can hear me with this thing (referring to microphone). But that's the issue. I travel up to Wilmington and that's an hour-and-a-half, about. There are the tolls involved, the gas involved, the time involved, and, of course, the risk involved. As we all get older, there is risk, especially going up into that area where you go across the bridge, etc. And then you come back and you do the same thing all over again. And then, when you get back, you find out that the thing still doesn't work.

So there's a lot of time, there's a lot of effort. And by the time you're through here, you say to yourself, "Is it really worth it?" And so my issue is: up north, within 30 minutes I could get anything I wanted. Down

here, it takes me an hour-and-a-half or more. And then maybe I don't get anything, all right?

Thanks for your time, folks. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, Dan.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Of anyone, I should have not neglected Lyons; you're right. I actually did my dental residency -- I don't know if you folks know -- was in Lyons VA and in East Orange. But I was mostly in Lyons, which was predominantly neuropsychiatric at the time, as well, though. But I was a dental resident -- I can't do the hearing aid thing. I wish I could help you. (laughter)

SENATOR BEACH: That wasn't an advertisement, was it, Senator? (laughter) I just wanted to check.

That concludes the speakers who have signed up to speak, and I would say if you are one of the many who didn't actually come up to speak, we certainly appreciate your attendance. And, collectively, we have a much stronger voice on this issue.

So I think you deserve to give yourselves a nice round of applause. (applause) Thank you for coming out.

Yes, sir?

CHARLES KASPARIAN: May I please, sir?

SENATOR BEACH: Oh, absolutely. You're a lot bigger than I am, so you can do whatever you want. (laughter)

MR. KASPARIAN: My name is Charles Kasparian, K-A-S-P-A-R-I-A-N. I am the County Commander for the American Legion, Atlantic County.

Next month I will be the Vice Commander -- State Vice Commander for southern New Jersey. To bring about a point, when you say about Ocean County -- which comes under southern New Jersey -- because that's going to be one of the counties that I represent, and there's over 5,000 members there.

So I want you to know that whatever I can do for this Committee, the 15 posts that I'm in charge of right now, and the rest that will be under southern New Jersey as of next month, we're behind you 100 percent. Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you, sir.

Is there anyone else before we actually-- Yes?

BILL COULTER: Thank you very much.

I think Senator Van Drew has really stepped up to the plate many times for us, and we appreciate that.

Number One: My wife is in the healthcare facility (*sic*)-- My name is Bill Coulter, C-O-U-L-T-E-R. I'm a retired Air Force sergeant. One thing I'd like to say: One reason why Somers Point has such great response is -- a lot of-- Demaris retired from the service, a lot of people on the Council are service people. So get out and support your town.

My wife is in a healthcare professional career field. And one of the questions that she always asks me, "Why is there not any preventive medicine, preventive programs, for the veterans?" When she sees them, it's kind of late for them. She feels that by providing them with preventative care would save a tremendous amount of dollars. Giving them the opportunity to have a preventative facility in southern New Jersey would

certainly eliminate a lot of that, a lot of the problems that she sees with the veterans. Thank you very much. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you.

RUSSELL SMITH: Can I say something?

SENATOR BEACH: Absolutely. I'll come over to you.

MR. SMITH: My name is Russell Smith. First of all, thanks for coming.

I just have two things. I'm from Ventnor; my name is Smith, Russell Smith, S-M-I-T-H. (laughter) As you can tell, I'm a World War II veteran; I was with the 43rd Division in the Philippines, okay? But be that as it may, I have never used the facilities of the VA. The only thing that I have a complaint about is about 10 or 12 years ago, I got a card that says I'm in the system -- in the VA system. I found out now that that card is no good; that I have to go all the way to Wilmington to get a new ID card, and my question is: why can't they have that kind of facility here at one of the clinics to save us from going down there to get it?

The other thing is -- you might call it a gripe. When I was District Commander of the VFW in 1967 and 1968, they had a task force -- it wasn't called a task force then, just a committee -- to look into the VA having a hospital here in southern New Jersey. My thought to you, gentlemen and ladies, don't disappoint us again. Thank you. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Mr. Smith, thank you.

MR. SMITH: I appreciate that; thanks for coming out.

SENATOR BEACH: You remind me of my dad, Mr. Smith.

MR. SMITH: Uh oh.

SENATOR BEACH: When I introduce my dad, I say “Guam, Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and Iwo Jima.” God bless you, sir.

MR. SMITH: Thank you.

SENATOR BEACH: Is there any-- Yes, Mr. Campbell.

ROBERT CAMPBELL: Good morning, everybody. My name is Robert Campbell, C-A-M-P-B-E-L-L, and I’m from Hamilton Township. I’m on the Veterans Advisory Commission of Hamilton Township, and my organizational background in veterans is extensive. I won’t go into it, but I belong to 14 veterans’ organizations.

I can only tell you this: that in my conversations with my board members, including Lou Green and Red back there, and numerous other people in the Township, that the 25,000 or 30,000 people in Hamilton Township, in my opinion, are 100 percent behind what you guys want to do. And if there’s anything at all that we in Hamilton Township -- that’s Hamilton in Atlantic County (laughter). I was asked one time by a reporter, “Are you from Trenton?” I said, “No, sir. I’m from God’s country.” (laughter) As a former mayor, that was a little pun there.

But anyhow, I do appreciate-- First of all, these guys who are behind me are my heroes -- every one of them; every one of them. And I’ve been in the American Legion -- this year will be my 50th year in the American Legion. So I have a little bit of background, and I do feel that we can help, and we’ll be glad to help. And the bus leaves out of Mays Landing, so if we can help get a better bus, we’ll work on that as well, if we can. So anything you need from Atlantic County, as far as the County seat is concerned, I’m sure that our municipal officials will be behind you 100 percent. The Veterans Advisory Board, I’m sure, will be behind you 100

percent. And, most importantly, I will also be behind you, whatever we can do.

And God bless all these men and women who have served our country nobly, honestly, and heroically. And thank you all for your service, what you do at the State level. I know how hard it is, and how important it is, and how much guff that you take a lot of times. You don't have any guff from us; you've got our support. Thank you very much. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you.

Seeing no one, we will vote on, first, S-1189. And this bill establishes -- sponsored by Senator Van Drew -- establishes a New Jersey Veterans Hospital Task Force. May I have a motion?

SENATOR HAINES: Move the bill.

SENATOR BEACH: Senator Haines.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Second.

SENATOR BEACH: Second by Senator Van Drew.

Roll call.

MS. PINO MURPHY: On the motion to release Senate Bill 1189, as amended. Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Vice Chairman Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Beach.

SENATOR BEACH: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: The bill passes. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Thank you.

The second bill is SR-28, sponsored by Senator Van Drew, that urges President and Congress to immediately enact legislation establishing a Veterans Regional Medical Center in southern New Jersey. May I have a motion?

SENATOR VAN DREW: Motion.

SENATOR BEACH: Senator Van Drew.

SENATOR BEACH: Senator Van Drew. Second?

SENATOR HAINES: Second.

SENATOR BEACH: Senator Haines.

Roll call, please.

MS. PINO MURPHY: On the motion to release Senate Resolution 28, as amended. Senator Haines.

SENATOR HAINES: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Vice Chairman Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Beach.

SENATOR BEACH: Yes.

MS. PINO MURPHY: The bill passes. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: At this time, before we conclude, I would ask Senator Haines if he would like to make a few remarks.

SENATOR HAINES: Thank you, Senator Beach.

And I want to thank each and every one of you in this room for coming out and joining us today, and thank you for your patience today and throughout your lives -- as has been demonstrated -- and your dignity as witnesses in presenting your case. And I know there's a lot of emotion

and you can tell a lot of stories here that would drag at our hearts, and we know that.

And I also want to compliment the staff and the leadership here at Post 2189. This is my first visit down here, and it's a wonderful post, and I see you have great activities here on weekends; and all my best wishes to you.

We hear today what we've been hearing, as a Committee, since we got started this year: an unmet need that has been going on for many years; too long, but we hear this -- we've been hearing this -- we've all heard it in our other capacities. I know Senator Beach was a Freeholder in Camden County, I in Burlington County, and we heard it there as well; and Senator Van Drew here in Cape May County. And we all, in our way, tried to do piecemeal work to address the issue, with the various kind of transportation services provided by the County -- addressing, really, what is a Federal issue. We hear about volunteer transportation here today, which is beyond belief but certainly noble and courageous. We have had various bills from this Committee about-- You heard today a bill for education. We had a bill raised from Committee for a mobile unit -- just an informational unit -- it would be mobile and travel around the state; state-of-the-art kind of unit. And you presented clear and convincing testimony today about many issues. Certainly you say that you support the Task Force, which is quite obvious. Travel seems to be a primary issue, but travel itself can be a problem as we've heard today as well, for people who were in dialysis, radiation, other kinds of treatment. Travel can discourage treatment. And that can result in worsening of the condition, which I'm

not telling you anything -- I know you know it. Not to mention the inefficiencies involved.

And yes, we have to look at cost, and there's certainly cost inefficiencies to what is happening here. Services are available locally. This is such a widespread problem that needs a holistic universal approach, and I don't know why it hasn't happened. But we're here to do our best to make it happen. The Task Force is step one, and I think there's a lot of people here that could be on a Task Force, right Senator?

SENATOR BEACH: Absolutely.

SENATOR HAINES: You've got some great ideas, and I'm looking forward to your testimony at the Task Force and to see the results of the report; and, moving forward, to address those issues that are long overdue. And I thank you, once again, for your service, your friendship, your being citizens of this great country with us.

Thank you, Senator Beach. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: Senator Van Drew.

SENATOR VAN DREW: Thank you all for coming out today. This is a good first step. Somebody asked me before: Are we sure we're going to get this done now? And I have this habit of always telling the truth, so what I said to them is what I'll say to you. The one promise I'll make is we're going to work our hardest, and we're going to do our very best to make it happen. I don't know how it's all going to turn it out, but it can only get better, because we have been underserved.

You know, when we mentioned, before, the VA system: Actually, that was my strongest and first experience with veterans; and for those of you who do know Lyons VA, it is neuropsychiatric. And when I

speaking to folks about veterans and about war, when you see what individual human beings have gone through -- if you could see, for real, the broken hearts, the broken bodies, and the broken souls of the men and the women who come back sometimes and what they go through, there's no question that everybody would understand that we have to take care of our people when they come back. It is shameful that politicians love to give the speeches and we love to get the credit; hopefully we don't do that. I don't believe that we do, but then when actually the folks come back, we forget about them a little bit. We don't want to do that, and we're not going to do that.

So the point of this Task Force is more than just revisiting the issue, because that's been done before, and that's been done for decades. This has been an age-old issue that has been around forever. But what this body of people -- once they are appointed -- are going to do is to assemble the information, to get the statistics, to keep having the meetings over a longer period of time. We've had meetings -- many years ago before my time -- that occurred just like this, but then it got forgotten. Hopefully this won't, because this will be an official, actual piece of legislation which was passed today. This isn't just ceremonial -- it's real. And eventually when it works its way through both Houses, that legislation will then officially establish the Task Force which will be appointed; there will be official documents that will be produced after that with official recommendations made to our Federal folks that, hopefully, can produce something that's real, and tangible, and better.

The final thing I'll say is, and I mean this, we've got nothing to lose, so we should do this thing.

I thank you so much for your help today. (applause)

SENATOR BEACH: And as we conclude today's meeting, I would like to thank the Post and their leadership for their hospitality. I would also like to thank Senate President Steve Sweeney for allowing us to have our meeting off-site today. That was very nice of him to do that.

And I would also like to thank him because, whether you can believe this or not, this is actually the first year that the New Jersey State Senate has actually had a Veterans and Military Affairs Committee. (applause) So thank you to Senator Sweeney.

And as we conclude, I would like to thank Senator Haines for his continual support of our veterans; Senator Connors; and I would especially like today to thank Senator Van Drew for taking the leadership on this issue for South Jersey, and being our point person. Thank you, Senator Van Drew. (applause)

And as we conclude, I'd like to say God bless each and every one of you, and God bless America. Thank you for coming today. (applause)

The meeting is adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)