

**TESTIMONY  
BY  
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DIRECTOR  
OF THE  
INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
TO THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON  
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
FIELD HEARING  
SEPTEMBER 5, 2001  
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the invitation to appear and present testimony concerning the quality of care and management issues at the Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center, and concerning the management and delivery of benefits by the Regional Office for Benefits in Indianapolis.

As Director of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs I have a vested interest in both of these areas. But, first, I want to thank the Directors of both facilities for their cooperative effort in working with our Agency to identify the needs of Hoosier veterans and then provide those veterans with high quality care and service.

Your Committee and Secretary Principi may or may not be aware of an outreach program for veterans that our Lieutenant Governor Joe Kernan started four years ago.

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Joe was a former Navy pilot serving during the Vietnam War, and was shot down over North Vietnam and spent a year as a Prisoner of War. It was not until he became Lieutenant Governor and he and I were visiting the Roudeush VA medical facility that we had a discussion about veterans' benefits. He then discovered that he was eligible for many benefits of which he was not aware. He made a commitment that day to insure that every effort be made to inform the veterans and their families in our State about the benefits to which they are entitled.

Working with the Regional Office and the Medical Center we have mailed over 70,000 brochures and held numerous seminars and conferences. The staffs of the VA Regional Office and Medical Center here in Indianapolis have participated and have been an integral part of this program.

I, personally, feel that the veterans in Indiana are fortunate to have the dedicated staffs and quality of services provided by both the VA Regional Office and the Roudebush VA Medical Center.

Regarding complaints on quality of services from either facility, the most common one I receive is the length of time it takes for a veteran to get an appointment to see a doctor. That time span has been running about six (6) months – which I, personally, feel is too long. It is going to be difficult to resolve that problem unless Congress has a group of doctors they are hiding and ready to place in our Medical Center.

I am concerned about resources for our Region. I understand that our Region, based on the President's budget for FY02, is projecting a deficit of 33 million dollars. Obviously, if this is correct, cuts will have to be made, and this could affect the quality of services provided to our veteran population.

In summary, overall our Agency is pleased with the management and quality of care being provided to veterans by both the VA Regional Office and the Roudebush VA Medical Center, with the exception of the one area mentioned above.

My staff and I look forward to facing the challenges of not only the Federal VA System but to those we encounter in State Government as well. We will address them as a partner in a cooperative manner – just as we have for the past 4-1/2 years.

Again, I appreciate being given the opportunity to be here today and provide you with some information from State Government.