

3/07/08 Moran Meets with New Veterans Affairs Secretary

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Encourages Strong Support for Kansas Veterans

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran this week met with recently-confirmed Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary James Peake to discuss the importance of strong VA services for Kansas veterans. Peake was sworn into office in December.

"Caring for our veterans must be a national priority," Moran said. "The VA and Congress have a responsibility to work together to make sure veterans and their families receive the health care, benefits and services they need and deserve. I appreciate Secretary Peake's attention to issues important to Kansas veterans and look forward to working with him."

Moran and Peake talked about a number of issues affecting Kansas veterans, including increasing access to medical care in rural areas. Moran successfully offered an amendment last year that increased the mileage reimbursement rate for veterans traveling to VA medical facilities. Moran has also introduced legislation that would provide veterans living in rural areas with more health care options. The Rural Veterans Access to Care Act would enable rural veterans enrolled in the VA health system to receive care closer to home at a local hospital or community physician's office rather than traveling long distances to VA facilities.

The two also discussed the need for greater attention to be given to reducing the large backlog of pending disability claims. Veterans now wait an average of 183 days for the VA to issue a claims decision. Last year's veterans spending legislation, which provided a record increase in funding for veterans, added more than 1,000 new claims processors to help address the claims backlog.

In addition to discussing rural access and the claims backlog, Moran spoke about the importance of quickly implementing legislation he introduced that makes additional mental health services available to veterans. Moran's legislation has been signed into law and is now in the process of being put into practice by the VA.

Moran is a senior member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

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