

TESTIMONY
BY
SENATOR BOB DOLE
BEFORE THE RULES COMMITTEE
ON S. RES. 4
TO REORGANIZE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

January 7, 1976

MR. CHAIRMAN, I would like to take this opportunity to express my opposition to the provision in this resolution that would reconstitute the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee as a subcommittee of a new Human Resources Committee.

The veterans of Kansas have clearly indicated to me their preference for maintaining the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee as it presently exists. Many of these veterans have provided the highest level of service to their country that is possible. It is my feeling that we have a responsibility to give adequate attention to their concerns and their needs.

The view of this Senator is that the work load associated with veterans and veterans programs warrants retaining a full and separate Veterans Affairs Committee. There are now nearly 30 million Americans who are veterans of military service. There are a great many veterans programs ranging across a broad spectrum from education to medical care to burial services. Many of these programs are complex and require a great deal of attention. In my view, the legislative workload involved in modifying and improving these complex programs, warrants maintaining the Veterans Affairs Committee as it is.

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The Veterans Administration is the second largest agency in the Federal Government by the number of people employed and it is the third largest agency by the size of its budget.

The sheer size of the VA, with its 172 hospitals and many other installations and facilities, requires a great deal of work in order to maintain an adequate level of Congressional oversight. I believe if the Senate is to do an adequate job of reviewing the operations of the Veterans Administration and of keeping veterans programs at a high level of quality, it will require a full committee, not just one single subcommittee.

There is also a matter of retaining the identity of veterans programs. The proposal to merge the Veterans Affairs Committee into a new Human Resources Committee has caused many Kansas veterans to question whether the Senate intends to merge veterans programs into welfare and public services. Certainly, I think every Senator would agree that veterans programs should be kept separate with their own identity. In order to maintain the trust of our veterans, I believe we should retain the committee as it presently is.

The proposal to convert the Veterans Affairs Committee into a subcommittee weakens the assurance that veterans will receive the highest priority for services under the Veterans Administration. Many Kansas veterans have expressed their concern that putting veterans programs in the Human Resources Committee would make it easier to open up veterans programs to non-veterans. This nation owes a great debt to those veterans who served during her time

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of need. The Congress has committed itself to providing quality services to veterans. We should help insure that that is accomplished by keeping the Veterans Committee separate.

In 1970, when the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee was originally created, I spoke strongly in favor of forming the Committee. At that time, I said that forming a Veterans Committee "would be a singular recognition of the great sacrifice and dedication of millions of Americans who have served our country". I believe that statement is still true and we should keep the Committee as it was formed in 1970.

Patriotism and service to the country are absolutely essential to the continued existence of our nation. We should give the priority and stature that those qualities deserve by retaining the full Veterans Affairs Committee.

Mr. Chairman, I support the reorganization resolution. I share the view that our committee system is greatly in need of reform. However, I strongly oppose the provision that would convert the Veterans Affairs Committee into a subcommittee of a new Human Resources Committee. I urge that the Resolution be amended to retain the full and separate Veterans Committee.