

The Quality of Veterans Care-----June 11

Debate on Veterans Care-----Oct. 6



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## Senate

### THE QUALITY OF VETERAN'S CARE

Mr. MONDALE. Mr. President, attention has recently been turned to the quality of care which our wounded veterans from Vietnam have been receiving.

What we have seen has been a national disgrace.

Life magazine recently did a full cover spread on the shame of our overcrowded, understaffed, and underequipped veteran's hospitals. This article shocked the Nation, but it was no news to any veteran of Vietnam or to the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee on which I serve.

We began hearings on the quality of medical care for returning veterans last November. By January of this year, I had heard and read enough, as a member of that subcommittee, to state my strong feeling that "the casualties of the war in Vietnam must not come home simply to be made casualties of the war against inflation." The hearings, under the chairmanship of the able Senator from California (Mr. CRANSTON), were concluded in the end of April, and present a clear, objective, and shameful picture of our treatment of those who have paid so dearly in that war.

I must make it very clear that I am not faulting the veterans hospitals or the thousands of doctors and medical personnel who work so hard—against such odds—to bring care and comfort to our wounded and crippled veterans.

The fault—and there is, indeed, a very serious fault—lies with the administration, which has chosen to pour resources into aircraft carriers, ABM's, Pentagon public relations, and other military hardware while slashing some \$70 million from the original fiscal year 1970 VA hospital and medical care budget.

The full-time employment of doctors and nurses in the veterans hospitals is roughly at the level of 1966—in spite of the fact that casualties requiring hospital care have tripled since that year. And if the administration's fiscal year

1970 budget cut had been approved, an additional 3,586 medical-care personnel would have been dropped and some key facilities construction abandoned.

Senator CRANSTON has recommended, based on our hearings, \$174 million to be added to the VA budget for hospital and medical care. I strongly support these recommendations and hope that my colleagues will do so also. The need is carefully and vividly documented. Our responsibility cannot be more clear. And we can hardly question the ability of our Nation, which is evidently thought rich enough to afford a \$290 million supersonic transport that cannot fly over land, to afford the additional funds necessary for decent veterans care.

It is bad enough when vital domestic programs are sacrificed in the name of "fiscal restraint"—when the space program continues to eat up \$3.5 billion. It is worse when the workingman—and especially the young, the unskilled, and the minorities—are asked to sacrifice their jobs in our inequitable and ineffective fight against inflation. But when the wounded veteran, perhaps disabled for life because he served his country, is also asked to sacrifice medical attention, there is something wrong with much more than our economic policies. There is something tragically distorted in our values and our sense of moral commitments.

I make no secret of my displeasure with the continuation of the war and with what I consider to be excessive expenditures on questionable military hardware. But I will never for a moment question our deep gratitude to the men who have served or our deep responsibility to those who have paid so dearly.

Mr. President, what we owe these men can never truly be repaid. But we must make every effort to provide the finest care possible for these unfortunate victims of our Indochina war. I urge support of Senator CRANSTON's recommendations, and I urge the administration to reassess their obligation to those who have lost the most in this tragic conflict.

recommendations that now run the very tough gamut they are required to run through expert members of the present Committees on Finance and Labor and Public Welfare.

Therefore, I think we would see an adverse effect on the ability to pass badly needed legislation for veterans if we make this change.

Another point that should be considered seriously is that a new committee, with new staff, would create additional space problems in a Senate already plagued by space problems. I am speaking from personal experience. I represent what is now the largest State in the Nation, with more mail, more visitors, and probably more problems than any other State. We are sitting on top of each other in the office. We do not have sufficient space. Other Senators face the same problem. If we set up the new committee, where is the space to be found, and who is going to give up space they are presently using productively for what I believe would be an unproductive use?

The expense of a separate staff specializing in veteran's affairs is not justifiable. I do not know what that expense would be, but let us look at the House. The House Veterans Affairs Committee operates on a budget of \$425,000, with a staff of 17 or 18 full-time positions. Are we about to bring that unneeded cost to the Senate, when we have so many other costs that go unmet?

Mr. MONDALE. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. CRANSTON. I am delighted to yield to the Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. MONDALE. I am one of those who have traditionally supported the concept of creating a separate veterans' committee, but I have been in the process of changing my mind in the past 2 years as I have watched the relative product of our Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs as against the full committee of the House. I do not mean to be critical, because I think they have a very fine committee there. But I think it is fair to say that the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs has produced a remarkable array of reforms and improvements over the past 2 years, when one looks at the education improvements, the modernization and broadening of the GI bill in all its aspects—student assistance, vocational training high school assistance—and the rest.

The broad improvement long overdue in health services has been produced almost singlehandedly by the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee, under the leadership of the Senator from California, to expose the tragic conditions in some of our veterans' hospitals and to urge the kind of hospital care needed for returning GI's who have been wounded in Vietnam and those who have been in the hospitals over the years.

In these and many other ways, the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate, along with its counterpart, the subcommittee under the chairmanship of the distinguished Senator from Georgia, in the Senate Committee on Finance, has generally led the reforms in the area of veterans' care and veterans' benefits.

So that if the product and the achievements are to be the measure of a committee's or a subcommittee's effort, I think that that by itself proves the value of the present system.

I mean no criticism whatever of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, because I think it is a fine committee. But I believe that the product and the results of the present system in the Senate are such that I am prepared to change my mind and change my position and support the present system.

Mr. CRANSTON. I thank the Senator from Minnesota. He is a perfect example of one of the major points I am seeking to make. As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee, Senator MONDALE has brought great expertise in the areas of health, in education, in job training, and in job opportunities to the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs.

If a separate committee were created, it would be most unfortunate if his great expertise were lost.

Mr. MONDALE. Mr. President, will the Senator yield further?

Mr. CRANSTON. I yield.

Mr. MONDALE. Typical of the relationship of the two assignments is the mere matter of student assistance. One of the key elements in the entire GI program has been student assistance for returning GI's. I think it is one of the most exciting programs ever adopted. One of the key responsibilities, as a member of the Subcommittee on Education of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, has been the broad problem of student assistance generally. The two problems are exactly related, and to create a separate committee, I think, would actually duplicate the work.

I think, once again, that this shows the parallel responsibilities as to why the present subcommittee, in its present status, makes a great deal of sense.

Mr. CRANSTON. I thank the Senator for his significant contribution to this discussion.

Mr. COOK. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. CRANSTON. I yield.

Mr. COOK. I might suggest to the Senator that when I was reading through this page, I came to that section, and I wrote down three things: Does this call for a new staff? Why do we need a new standing committee? How many subcommittees?

I suppose every Senator gets a card in his office each morning. The one I received this morning, for example, shows a meeting of the Committee on Commerce at 9:30 a.m., a meeting of the Nutrition Subcommittee at 10:30 a.m., a meeting of the Subcommittee on Equal Education at 10 a.m., and at 10:30 a.m. a meeting of the Subcommittee on Internal Security.

I do not know in how many places a person can be at one time during the day.

I think we would be fooling ourselves by creating a new committee. We now have 13 standing committees. We now have four that are commonly referred to as minor committees.

It seems that every time in the past when the Senate has had a reorganization bill, one of the nice things it has done is to eliminate some of the subcommit-

tees, so that we can get back to normal for a while, and then we spoil it after a fashion. But this is the first time I know of that we have created a new committee, created the possibility of a \$400,000 staff, created the possibility of at least seven or eight subcommittees, which most major committees have; and, I might suggest, creating many more employees for some Members of the Senate who do not show up on their staffs, really and truly. I am being perfectly frank, and I think we all know that.

I just do not see how it is anticipated, at least for the benefit of the American public and the taxpayer, that ultimately we are going to have anything other than committees and subcommittees meeting with one Senator sitting, because none of the other Senators will have time to be there because their services are required at about five or six other places. If I am wrong in stating that, I should like for someone to correct me. It gets tremendously discouraging when one comes to the office in the morning to find out there are five or six places we have to be in all at the same time. I agree with the colloquy that has been going on between the Senator from Minnesota and the major opposition to the amendment because I do not know how we will ever justify not being where we should be. But we obviously cannot be there because there is no way to be in so many different places at the same time.

I wish to thank the Senator for bringing this up because I think it is important. Frankly, I am delighted that the House, in its wisdom, saw fit not to encumber us with one additional responsibility that would almost certainly create a tremendous liability at the same time.

Mr. CRANSTON. I thank the Senator from Kentucky. With his usual approach, he has zeroed in on one of the things the Senator from Minnesota and I had in mind in our discussion of this matter.

Mr. COOK. Rather obviously, when Senators face the choice of where they want to allocate their time, or spend their time, or decide which committee they want to be on, or which committee they will attend, we are, unhappily, going to find out that if this amendment prevails, too many Senators will decide that they do not have enough time for the interest of veterans as against the broader interest that they can relate to or deal with by attending other committees or seeking membership on other committees.

For instance, this morning, there was one committee I wanted to go to, which I felt was extremely important I attend, because it contained a nomination, but I was told by a member of my staff that, Heavens to Betsy, I could not do that, because I have a witness coming before one of the other committees and I would have to be there because the witness is a constituent of mine. Many Senators have faced that situation, of course. I believe it is a good opportunity to have a frank discussion with the American people who come to Washington to see us, only they find out when they walk into our office, they see us on the run, deciding how our time can best be spent,



whether in one place or another, because we are really needed in five.

It gets very discouraging, when a Senator gets a hurried call to go over to the New Senate Office Building to meet a quorum, and we go into the room long enough to establish a quorum. That is not the way to conduct the business of the people. We are adding more to it instead of less by this amendment. I am one of those who would like to see a reorganization bill that would specifically limit the number of subcommittees a major committee can have, so that we might be able to spend more time where it is most needed.

It is rather discouraging, for instance, when we go before a committee and a witness tells us, as he did the other day, that a piece of legislation then pending he thought was the worst piece of draftsmanship he had seen since the first draft of the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1899. It is not very nice to have someone say that about modern legislation that comes before a committee, but it is true; due, frankly, to the fact that Senators do not have the time, and do not have the opportunity for that degree of creativity that comes from good draftsmanship in legislation. I would hate to see that problem added to. I would like to see it lessened.

Mr. CRANSTON. I thank the Senator from Kentucky very much for his strong support and for the substantive points he has made in this discussion.

Mr. President, another argument that is being made on behalf of the amendment, that does not hold water and is not related to practices carried on elsewhere in Congress, is that there is need for parallel committees in both Houses. The Finance Committee of the Senate has jurisdiction on State and local taxation of interstate commerce. That is not the situation in the House. That is under their Judiciary Committee.

In the Senate, general health matters handled by the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare are handled in the House by the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. No changes are proposed in either of these matters in the pending legislation. Why not?

The House—if the parallel committee argument is such a valid one, which it is not—did not act to make a parallel Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Yet the House Education and Labor Committee does not have jurisdiction over health as does the Senate Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Nor does the Senate version propose a Senate parallel to the House Committee on Education as it would set up. There are many other examples of this total inconsistency.

I know of no instances wherein Senate split jurisdictions have delayed or denied action on necessary measures for veterans.

Several of the arguments presented for a separate committee by spokesmen in past hearings actually argue against what is now being done. When we analyze the argument being made, at the 1965 hearings, it was suggested that a separate committee would give speed and priority consideration to the interests of veterans.

The last hearings on the proposed legislative Reorganization Act were in 1966 and there have been no hearings since then. Yet much history has passed and the situation is different from what it was when the hearings were held and when this legislation was drafted.

It is clear that veteran's matters have received speedy and effective consideration in the 91st Congress under our present procedures and structures. Any more rapid action might be quite counterproductive, because it would be most likely careless action. We cannot act any faster than we have already acted, and still act wisely.

At the 1965 hearings, it was suggested that such a committee would provide veterans with a chairman who would act as the spokesman for any and all veterans legislation. Actually, there have been several very effective spokesmen for veterans judging by the action taken in the 91st Congress.

Another point that I think should be recognized by Senators is that we have no special Senate committee to handle the automobile industry and focus on those problems, or to focus on health matters—on issues that affect every American—or a separate committee on children's welfare, or on nonveterans matters. We do not even have one committee that handles exclusively labor matters, even though there are about twenty million union members and about 80 million workers, although, unhappily, quite a few of them are presently unemployed.

The Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare handles not only labor, veterans, but also health, education, poverty, alcoholism, narcotics, and other matters.

Specifically, in relation to what has been accomplished by the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee, which I am privileged to chair under the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, in the 91st Congress, a total of 44 measures have been referred to the subcommittee. This number includes 31 Senate bills and 13 House bills.

The subcommittee has held hearings on 28 of the bills referred to it. The subcommittee has also held oversight hearings on medical care for veterans wounded in Vietnam. These hearings have involved 14 days. The records of the hearings consist of a total of 2,629 pages packed with information.

Of the 44 measures referred to the subcommittee, 27 have been favorably acted upon by the subcommittee, either in the form presented, amended, or incorporated into other measures.

It is a matter of great pride to me and to the other members of the committee, that the actions of the subcommittee have been bipartisan and unanimous. Let me stress that point, Mr. President, that the actions of the subcommittee have been bipartisan and unanimous. All bills reported by the subcommittee—and that covers every bill we have acted on—have, thereafter, been unanimously acted upon by the full committee. And, thereafter, every bill reported by our subcommittee—and some of them have been controversial—has been acted upon

and supported unanimously and passed unanimously by the Senate.

The subcommittee has recommended a total of 13 bills, all of which have been passed by the Senate. Six of these bills have been enacted into law. Five of the bills have been passed by the Senate and are now pending action in the House. Two of the bills have been acted upon by the House since Senate passage and are now pending further Senate action.

Mr. President, I shall not dwell upon the substantive matters of what we have accomplished in terms of health care and education for veterans and in job training and job opportunities for veterans.

We have updated it and brought up to date as best we could the sums made available for these purposes, particularly for GI benefits for education in order to catch up with inflation. But we have broken ground in some very significant ways which I think could not have been done had we had the narrow focus of the committee proposed in the amendment.

In the field of medical care of veterans, there were shocking conditions, conditions with which every Member of the Senate and every citizen of this country is now familiar. We revealed the inadequate care and why it occurred. It was because of the inability to keep pace with inflation.

We got a very significant appropriation bill adopted by the Senate, approved by Congress, and sent to the White House.

Unfortunately, the measure was vetoed by the President for other purposes. But I assure the Senate that we will continue to work on the matter and that we will get this matter approved by Congress and signed by the President before this year is over.

I again point out that if the subcommittee had not undertaken this task of bringing to light the state of health care for our Vietnam wounded, I do not believe that the appropriations would have been so significantly increased. Many veterans would have continued to get deteriorating medical care. That will hopefully be remedied because our subcommittee has acted as it has.

Mr. TALMADGE. Mr. President, on behalf of the Finance Committee of the Senate, I rise to oppose the pending amendment.

The Finance Committee discussed this matter in executive session last week. A quorum was present. Those who were present were unanimous in their opposition to the creation of a separate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The rules of the Senate, in determining jurisdiction of various Senate committee, delegate to the Committee on Finance the following jurisdiction relating to veterans: veterans' measures generally; pensions of all the wars of the United States, general and special; life insurance issued by the Government on account of service in the Armed Forces; and compensation of veterans.

Those items cost the taxpayers of this country about \$5 billion a year.

The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over all payments of benefits to



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