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HON. DANIEL K. AKAKA
SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
APRIL 14, 1987

INITIALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE FOR HOLDING TODAY'S HEARING ON THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN HAWAII. THE COMMITTEE HAS ASSEMBLED QUITE A LIST OF IMPRESSIVE WITNESSES, AND I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING THEIR TESTIMONY. HOWEVER, I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DID NOT ALSO EXTEND MY GRATITUDE TO SENATOR MATSUNAGA FOR INVITING ME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS HEARING. I KNOW WE WILL ALL BENEFIT FROM THE UNDERSTANDING WE GAIN TODAY AS WE LISTEN TO THE MANY INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE TOUCHED BY THE VA'S HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN HAWAII.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED HEARING FROM OUR WITNESSES, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE SOME STATISTICS ON THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION (VA) WHICH MAY SURPRISE YOU. THE VA IS LARGER THAN ANY ONE OF THE DEPARTMENTS OF STATE, INTERIOR, LABOR, COMMERCE, EDUCATION, TRANSPORTATION, ENERGY, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE. THE AGENCY RANKS SECOND ONLY TO THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE IN NUMBER OF PERSONNEL WITH OVER 244,000 EMPLOYEES. THE VA'S BUDGET FOR FY88 WILL PROBABLY EXCEED \$27 BILLION AND SUPPORT A VARIETY OF MEDICAL, EDUCATION, INCOME, JOB TRAINING, INSURANCE AND LOAN PROGRAMS WHICH ARE POTENTIALLY AVAILABLE TO THE COUNTRY'S 28 MILLION VETERANS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS. IT ADMINISTERS THE LARGEST HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN THE FREE WORLD WITH 1.5 MILLION VETERANS RECEIVING INPATIENT HEALTH CARE.

THE VA COMPENSATION AND PENSION PROGRAM HAS AN ANNUAL EXPENDITURE IN EXCESS OF \$14 BILLION FOR DISABLED AND LOW-INCOME VETERANS, THEIR SURVIVORS AND DEPENDENTS. THESE FIGURES ARE INDEED STAGGERING AND DRAMATICALLY ILLUSTRATE JUST HOW IMPORTANT THE VA IS AND HOW IMPORTANT ITS RELATED PROGRAMS ARE TO NOT ONLY VETERANS BUT TO THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE.

NOW THAT WE HAVE A PICTURE OF THE OVERALL IMPORTANCE OF THE VA, LET'S FOCUS ON HAWAII. OUR STATE IS HOME TO MORE THAN 102,000 VETERANS, 15,700 OF THEM ARE OVER THE AGE OF 65. BY 1990, THAT FIGURE IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE TO 23,900, AND BY THE YEAR 2000, THE TOTAL WILL HAVE RISEN TO MORE THAN 35,700. THESE NUMBERS INDICATE THE GROWTH WE CAN EXPECT IN THE SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION WHICH TRADITIONALLY HAS BEEN VERY DEPENDENT UPON THE VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM.

AND HOW DO THESE NUMBERS TRANSLATE TO ACTUAL EXPENDITURES FOR HEALTH CARE? TO MEET ITS HEALTH CARE RESPONSIBILITY TO HAWAII VETERANS, THE VA PROVIDED \$21 MILLION DURING FY85. VA AND ASSOCIATED FACILITIES IN HAWAII RECORDED 66,584 OUTPATIENT VISITS DURING FY85. ADDITIONALLY, 50 VETERANS RECEIVED NURSING HOME CARE. VA FACILITIES IN THE STATE EMPLOYED 235 PEOPLE, WITH SALARIES TOTALING ALMOST \$6 MILLION.

YET, FUNDING FOR MEDICAL CARE COMPRISES ONLY PART OF VA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO HAWAII. DURING FY85, TOTAL VA ALLOCATIONS FOR HAWAII VETERANS AMOUNTED TO MORE THAN \$81 MILLION. INCLUDED IN THIS AMOUNT WAS \$43 MILLION WHICH WAS PAID TO OVER 10,000 HAWAII RESIDENTS WHO ARE EITHER DISABLED AS A RESULT OF MILITARY SERVICE OR RECEIVE PENSION

BENEFITS; \$9 MILLION IN READJUSTMENT AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM; \$7 MILLION FOR INSURANCE AND INDEMNITIES; AND \$28,000 FOR CONSTRUCTION AND RELATED COSTS.

IT IS CLEAR THAT WE BENEFIT SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THE VA'S INVESTMENT IN HAWAII. NOW, I LOOK FORWARD TO EXAMINING ONE COMPONENT OF THE VA-PROVIDED SERVICES--THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM--TO SEE HOW OUR TAX DOLLARS ARE BEING SPENT. I AM EAGER TO LEARN FROM YOU WHETHER THIS MONEY IS BEING UTILIZED WISELY, HOW THE VETERANS' HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN HAWAII CAN BE IMPROVED, AND HOW THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM CAN MEET THE FUTURE NEEDS OF AN AGING VETERANS POPULATION.

THANK YOU.