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**ICYMI: Heller Urges Support for Nevada Native**

**Nations Land Act**

**(Washington, D.C.)** – Today, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) offered remarks for the record at the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs hearing about the Nevada Native Nations Land Act (S. 2480). Heller joined Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) by introducing the bill, which directs 90,000 acres of Nevada land into trust for seven northern Nevada tribal entities.

**Remarks as prepared:**

Thank you Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Burr for holding this hearing today. I believe this Committee must continue conducting this vigorous oversight at a very troubling time in the Department’s history. It is also important that the Conference Committee works quickly to reach an agreement so Congress can pass a bill to help Veterans get the care they need immediately.

In a short number of months, Congress, Veterans, and the American public have had a glimpse into the failure of the VA to provide quality care to Veterans across the nation, and it is disturbing to say the least that many of our Veterans went without health care because a few employees decided to cheat the system.

Every time I am home, I repeatedly hear from Nevada veterans about their individual stories and difficulties they’ve faced with the VA, and many of them are doubtful it will ever improve.

I share their frustration. Our veterans are entitled to a VA system that delivers the benefits and care they have earned in a timely manner. But today, the VA is not meeting that standard.

I have a timeline here showing the progression of this scandal, and every week there has been a new revelation about failure to provide quality care, another VA official resigning due to a lack of accountability, or whistleblowers being punished for doing the right thing.

It is unfathomable so many problems existed at the VA for years and management at some level allowed it to continue.

That’s not going to be the case anymore, and I expect the nominee for VA Secretary to prove to this Committee that he will bring a dedicated and unrelenting approach to fixing this broken agency.

Veterans in my home state of Nevada are also facing significant problems that I expect to be resolved.

At the Las Vegas VA Hospital, more than 6,700 Veterans were forced to wait more than 30 days for an appointment.

And just last year, a blind female veteran waited nearly 6 hours in the Emergency Room before being seen by a nurse or doctor.

I have spoken with the VA Hospital Director Duff about improving these wait times and better meeting the demand of Veterans in the area, and I expect this hospital to provide the best care possible moving forward.

Over in Pahrump, 6,000 Veterans have waited more than two years for a clinic to be built. Despite promises of progress, construction of this facility has not started, and VA officials have not even provided a timeline for final approval of this facility.

Pahrump Veterans have waited too long for this clinic to be built, and I would like to see the VA break ground on this facility before the fall so construction can begin and Pahrump Veterans can finally receive the care they waited for.

In Northern Nevada, the Reno VA Hospital is still waiting for a director to be hired. As the VA works to bring greater accountability and transparency to its health system, I want to ensure any new director is committed to this goal.

Unfortunately, the challenge with the VA health care system is not the only issue facing Nevada Veterans. These same problems with management and accountability are also an issue in the Veterans Benefits Administration, which processes the disability claims for veterans.

The VBA continues to struggle to eliminate the veterans’ disability claims backlog as it operates under a 1940s system in the 21st century.

On a local level, Nevada’s Veterans are facing the worst of the claims backlog.

Not only does Nevada have the longest wait in the nation at 340 days for a claim to be processed, but the VA Regional Office in my state was recently audited by the Inspector General with less than satisfactory results.

The IG found that 51 percent of disability claims they reviewed were inaccurately processed, and many of the problems at this VARO persisted due to poor management.

The VA has been given enough chances to fix the backlog for Nevada’s Veterans, but has failed to produce adequate results.

What Veterans need now is for Congress to take action to reform the outdated claims processing system.

That is why Senator Casey and I introduced the bipartisan 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act to address three areas of the claims process: Claims submission, VARO practices, and federal agency responses to VA requests.

Just as Congress needs to address the quality and timeliness of our veterans’ health care, Congress must also work to improve the delivery of their benefits, which is why I have continued to encourage Chairman Sanders to re-schedule a legislative hearing so the Committee can consider this important bill.

Again, thank you Acting Secretary Gibson for testifying today. I look forward to hearing about what the VA is doing to improve care and benefits for Nevada and our nation’s veterans.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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