

Veterans explain medical care concerns to Sen. Crapo

Communications between VA and private doctors said to often be difficult

Area residents voiced their frustrations and successes about communicating with Veterans Administration facility staffs to U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo of Idaho on Wednesday at the fire station in Kendrick.

Some addressed problems they have experienced with the Veterans Choice Program, which allows eligible veterans to receive health care in their communities rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility.

Crapo said if travel is too difficult, if a specialist is in a veteran's local community or if there is an emergency and a veteran needs care fast, then a veteran should be able to get that care at a VA facility or a private doctor, whichever the veteran chooses.

One of problems Crapo said he hears from veterans regularly is private sector doctors are not trained well enough to interact with the VA hospitals. He said private sector providers and the VA doctors need to make sure they can communicate and work efficiently to eliminate some of the problems veterans have mentioned.

Crapo told the roughly 25 people, mostly veterans, who attended the meeting Wednesday, that major legislation was recently passed in Washington, D.C., to help solve problems seen at VA hospitals the last couple of years.

He had introduced legislation called the Veterans Health Administration Reform Act of 2017, or Senate Bill 1279, which was written using responses from Crapo's two statewide veterans' surveys and information from congressionally mandated reports suggesting how veterans' health care could be improved. Part of the bill would have streamlined non-VA care programs into one "Care in the Community Program" that would have allowed the VA to easily refer veterans into the community for care when it was in the veterans' best interest.

Portions of S. 1279 are in the bill that recently passed, Crapo said.

Doctor appointment issues, incorrect medical records and overall miscommunication highlighted other problems local veterans brought forward Wednesday.

"We have a records problem, but that should not be the veterans' problem," Crapo said.

He said fires have destroyed some records.

One man said veterans need to learn the Choice Program and get involved with their own care.

"The Choice Program has been awesome for me," a Kendrick man said. "The people on the other (end of the phone) line have been incredible."

However, the man said it takes three or four phone calls to make an appointment with the VA hospital in Walla Walla or Lewiston.

IMPulse

Intermountain Media Pulse

A TRUETONE INCORPORATED COMPANY

**news
CLIP**

11623 Lake Shore
Nampa, ID 83686
(208) 880-9814

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

**Moscow-Pullman
Daily News**

Moscow, Idaho

Thursday Aug. 31, 2017

by Garrett Cabeza

Page 2 of 2

“I hope to be able to hold one of these meetings when every comment is the Choice Program is working for me and the VA system is providing good service and I don’t have to make three phone calls,” Crapo said.

He said he and others are finding these issues and homing in on them.

Residents addressed their military infrastructure concerns with Crapo as well.

One man said 39 percent of U.S. Marine Corps airplanes can fly while the rest are grounded. The man said funding needs to be more focused on improving the nation’s national defense.

“We are woefully behind on our infrastructure,” Crapo said.

The infrastructure issues jeopardize the country’s national security, Crapo added.

“Our national defense is the highest priority we have for our federal government,” he said.

One woman said a submarine her grandson uses at a base in Hawaii was built in 1978 and has experienced a few setbacks that could have cost his and his fellow sailors’ lives.

“We are not providing those who we are putting in harm’s way for our national defense with either the technology or the infrastructure or the individual and family support that we need to be providing,” Crapo said.

###

Copyright 2017 Moscow-Pullman Daily News