

**Senator Bob Dole**

**United States Senate Special Aging Committee**

**October 3, 2007**

Thank you, Senator Smith. It's a pleasure to be back on the Hill, and I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Senate Special Committee on Aging. In fact, each day I feel more and more qualified as an expert witness to talk about aging.

I am reminded this morning of the words of General George Marshall, who, during World War II, was once asked if America had a secret weapon that would ensure victory. "Yes," he said, "America does have a secret weapon. It is the best darned kids in the world." What was true in World War II has been true ever since in places like Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. America has remained free and strong precisely because we have kids who have always been willing to risk their life for their country. And it should go without saying that when these kids return home, America owes them more than our gratitude, we owe them the best medical care possible.

As you may know, former HHS Secretary Donna Shalala and I have recently finished serving as Co-Chairs of the President's Commission on America's Returning Wounded Warriors. Later this month, we will be testifying before the Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs concerning the recommendations of our commission—recommendations which focused on care being provided to our soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

I know that the purview of this committee, however, is limited to the care provided to and issues affecting our population of aging veterans, and I appreciate the spotlight you are shining on these heroes. Over 10 million of

America's 24 million veterans are over 65 years of age. For many, including myself, it has been over 60 years since they wore the uniform of our country. But time should not and must not diminish America's commitment to our veterans. It's no secret that like all federal departments, the Department of Veterans Affairs can be bureaucratic and confusing, and I am sure that will always be the case.

I know you have two very distinguished panels of experts who will testify this morning on a variety of important issues, including health care, homeless veterans, long term care needs of paralyzed veterans, and the mental health of veterans. The challenge I would give this committee, however, is to listen to these experts with an eye toward making recommendations on steps that can be taken to ensure that our aging veterans do not get lost in red tape.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership on these issues, and I look forward to answering any questions.