

# U.S. SENATOR BOB CASEY



**RANKING MEMBER** *Special Committee on Aging*

## **Sen. Casey's Opening Statement Veteran Scams: Protecting Those Who Protected Us November 6, 2019**

“Chairman Collins, thank you for holding this important hearing – especially as we prepare for Veterans Day. And I’m pleased, as I know we all are, that we are joined by three Veterans, one of whom is an active reservist, on this panel. We want to thank each you for your service to our country and we’re grateful for your testimony today.

“Veterans Day is only days away and it is a day in which we honor those who served our country – not only in war, but also in peace. And, it is a reminder of our abiding responsibility to serve them in return.

“President Lincoln outlined a simple, but vitally important mandate when it comes to the care that our Veterans are owed: ‘That we must care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan’.

“Way back in 1991, my father was taking the oath of office as Governor, it just happened to be the day before the invasion of Iraq when our soldiers were heading into combat and at that time he said, ‘we pray for the military families and for their loved ones serving around the globe; we also pray that we may be worthy of their valor’.

“Being worthy of their valor if you’re a legislator... if you happen to be a member of Congress, you have to prove yourself worthy of their valor by your actions.

“Here in the Senate, and the Congress overall, we have the opportunity and the ability to demonstrate that we are worthy of their valor by ensuring Veterans receive every single benefit that they are owed and even more.

“And, when we learn of barriers to those benefits, we must work to overcome those barriers.

“That is why I am fighting so hard to hold the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable for providing every Veteran access to information about their VA benefits.

“My legislation, the VA Website Accessibility Act, which I hope we can pass by the end of the year, would get us one-step closer to comprehensive accessibility for Veterans.

“It’s why I’m also fighting to ensure that caregivers who watch over our Veterans every single day are supported and given respite.

“The Supporting Veteran Caregivers Act, would ensure Veteran caregivers cannot be arbitrarily kicked out of the VA Caregivers program.

“And, as we’ll discuss today, it’s why Chairman Collins and I wanted to hold this hearing – to ensure that not one more Veteran loses one more penny to a scammer, a schemer or a con artist. So we must not stop with just the hearing.

“We know that 78 percent of Veterans reported receiving a scam attempt related to their Veteran status. Almost 8 out of 10. If we are to be worthy of the valor of our Veterans, this number should be zero. Not 78 percent. It should be zero.

“A recent report from the Government Accountability Office found that the VA lacks a central clearinghouse for soliciting and collecting information on potential financial exploitation of Veterans receiving pension benefits. To say this is troubling is an understatement.

“The GAO provided the VA with clear recommendations for addressing this problem: ‘systematically solicit and collect information on potential financial exploitation’ and ‘assess this information to address plans to address the potential exploitation of Veterans receiving pension benefits’.

“Instead of working to implement this recommendation, the VA is putting in place a process that the GAO claims would ‘not fully address the underlying issue...’

“I think [the GAO is] being a little charitable there in their assessment of what the VA is doing in response.

“This is totally unacceptable. That is why we are sending a letter—members of this committee, Chairman Collins and I, and others—to find out more about this decision and also why the VA is not doing more to combat scams against Veterans.

“As we will hear today, in order to put an end to the predatory practice of scammers—scammers of the worst kind who prey upon those who have served—there needs to be an all-hands-on-deck approach.

“We need to find a way to stop these scammers from getting through phone lines. We need to be sure that people are educated about how to avoid becoming the victim of a scam. There must be a place to report scammers—whether that is the DOJ, the FTC, the VA or right here to the Aging Committee by way of our Fraud Hotline. And, we need to ensure that prosecutors have the tools they need to go after these criminals and put them behind bars.

“I am certain that our hearing today will touch upon all of these topics and more. But it is unconscionable to me that someone would stoop so low as to steal money from someone who agreed to sacrifice so much for our country.

“It is unconscionable to me, and I know to others, that someone would stoop so low as to pad their own pockets by spewing a tale of caring for Veterans, while doing nothing of the kind.

“Chairman Collins, this hearing could not be more important. Thank you for holding it, and we look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.”

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