

**Rules Committee Hearing on Veterans Voting Support Act  
Opening Statement of Sen. Bob Bennett, Ranking Republican Member  
September 15, 2008**

Thank you Madam Chair. It is very clear that your concern and your activities have stimulated the VA to move in the direction of the new policy which you and I applaud. I think it is appropriate that we have this hearing to determine whether or not the policy is sufficient or whether legislation might be necessary. With that I am ready to hear the witnesses.

**Question and Answer**

I come new to this issue and as I listen to it I come to the conclusion that the VA has focused primarily on the mission of providing health care and has seen these kinds of efforts as a distraction which has offended various veteran groups. Now it seems to me that everyone is coming together.

The position the chairman has taken is to amend the bill to reflect the reality on the ground, and with all due respect to the institution in which I sit, that is an unusual position for us to take. The people who are now trying in good faith to respond to the reality on the ground are perfectly willing to have their efforts codified. I see no reason why this can't be resolved rather quickly and easily.

The only comment I would make to you Mr. Sullivan, as you become part of this effort, this is semantics, but semantics can be important. You talk about the right of veterans to vote. The bill and the efforts that are being pushed forward don't focus on the right of veterans to vote; they focus on the right of outside groups to enter the VA presumably to help people to vote. That may seem like a slight difference, but it is a difference, and that is the core of the controversy here.

The Veterans Administration absolutely supports the right of people to vote, but they are not convinced that the entry of outside groups will facilitate that to the degree that you are convinced. I think you are both acting in good faith and in good faith I think we will be able to work this out.