

Statement of Oversight Ranking Member Ralph Norman
Members' Day Hearing
9:30 a.m. Friday, May 17th, 2019

Good morning. Thank you Chairwoman Johnson for holding this Member Day and allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of my bill H.R. 617, The Department of Energy Veterans' Health Initiative Act.

I introduced this bill last Congress and was thrilled to see it pass the House unanimously. I was proud to reintroduce the bill again this Congress and was glad to see that it retained bipartisan support. I am grateful to the many members of this Committee who cosponsored this legislation, including the continued support from across the aisle, of Mr. Lipinski. Even more encouraging for our nation's veterans is that Senator Ernst introduced a bipartisan Senate companion to my bill.

This legislation authorizes a partnership between the Department of Energy (D-O-E) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in order to facilitate research on the high priority health care needs of the VA, artificial intelligence, and big data science.

Under the VA's voluntary data collection program, the Million Veterans Program, the VA has collected detailed health information and genomic data volunteered by over six hundred thousand veterans.

However, the interagency partnership authorized by my bill is necessary to analyze this data and ultimately provide better care for our nation's veterans. The DOE has the capability to securely store and analyze this data based on its robust research in computational sciences and data analytics. In addition, the DOE national labs have six of the world's top ten fastest supercomputers, including the world's fastest super computer.

If we are able to sign this legislation into law, then these supercomputers would be used to analyze VA health data and look for patterns that will help improve the medical treatments for heart disease, traumatic brain injury, and cancer.

While this alone should warrant consideration of the bill, because we should be taking any step possible to improve the medical care of our men and women who answered the call to serve and were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, this partnership would also benefit the DOE. Analyzing the complex health data will allow our scientists to remain leaders in advanced computing and allow for the development of computing tools necessary to address big data challenges in the future. This legislation also includes a pilot program to help DOE develop infrastructure to support other interagency partnerships, allowing the Department to help other federal agency tackle similar complex problems.

I encourage my colleagues to support this bill – a bill that promises to improve our veterans' ability to access better health care services and challenge our scientists so that they remain world leaders in advance computing.

Thank you.