

SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPARDNESS COMMITTEE

APRIL 20, 2010

ROBERT D. FORD

I THANK SENATOR BAKER AND THE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR IN BEHALF OF PENNSYLVANIA VETERANS ON THE SUBJECT OF PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO THOSE WHO HAVE ANSWERED THE CALL THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY TO SERVE IN DEFENSE OF OUR NATION AND THIS COMMONWEALTH.

GIVEN THE LIMITED TIME AVAILABLE, I HAVE GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT AS TO HOW I MIGHT MAKE AN IMPRESSION EQUAL TO THE NEED THAT I FEEL IS REQUIRED TO ASSIST OUR VETERAN POPULATION, AND IN PARTICULAR, THE NEED TO RESTORE THE BEST OUTREACH SERVICE PREVIOUSLY AVAILABLE, THE VETERANS OUTREACH AND ASSISTANCE CENTERS. REGARDING THE OPERATIONS OF THE CENTERS THEMSELVES, THE COMMITTEE IS FORTUNATE TO HAVE PRESENT MR. RON PENNYPACKER, A 30 YEAR VETERAN OF THIS OPERATION, AND THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE IN BOYERTOWN.

IN ADDITION, A STATEMENT HAS BEEN SUBMITTED BY MR. BRIAN MORRIS, ANOTHER EXPERIENCED 24 YEAR EMPLOYEE, AND FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE ERIE OFFICE.

THESE TWO INDIVIDUALS CAN PROVIDE THE COMMITTEE WITH ANY INFORMATION AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VETERANS OUTREACH CENTERS. I ALSO NOTE TO THE COMMITTEE THAT MR. MORRIS'

STATEMENT ALSO INCLUDES AN ADDENDUM REGARDING THE TREATMENT OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THESE CENTERS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY AFTER THE SUDDEN DECISION TO CLOSE THIS VITAL OPERATION. THE CONDUCT TOWARDS THESE LONG-TERM DEDICATED EMPLOYEES BY THIS STATE AGENCY WAS NOTHING LESS THAN DISGRACEFUL!

THEREFORE, HAVING SAID ALL THAT , LET ME NOW SAY THIS: I AM HERE TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING REQUEST OF ALL ELECTED OFFICIALS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA:

“PLEASE TREAT OUR VETERANS WITH THE SAME REGARD AND URGENCY AS WE TREAT PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES!”

RECENTLY, THE LEGISLATURE STOOD BY WHILE THE GOVERNOR ARBITRARILY ELIMINATED THE FIVE GOVERNOR’S VETERANS OUTREACH AND ASSISTANCE CENTERS, A SERVICE BEGUN BY GOVERNOR SHAPP IN RESPONSE TO THE VIETNAM WAR, AND CONTINUED BY EVERY GOVERNOR UNTIL NOW AT THE MOST RECENT COST OF ONLY ONE MILLION DOLLARS PER YEAR.

DURING THIS SAME PERIOD, HOWEVER, GOVERNORS AND THE STATE LEGISLATURE HAVE PROVIDED HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS TO CONSTRUCT VETERANS STADIUM IN PHILADELPHIA, THREE RIVERS STADIUM IN PITTSBURGH, TO THEN TEAR THEM DOWN AS INSUFFICIENT, AND TO BUILD EVEN MORE COSTLY VENUES IN THEIR

PLACE. HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO PROVIDE A PLACE FOR PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES, WHO THEMSELVES MAKE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS PER YEAR, TO PLAY SPORTS.

MILLIONAIRE PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES FOR WHOM MILITARY SERVICE IS THE RAREST OF RARE ACHIEVEMENT TO BE FOUND ON THEIR RESUME'S. IT IS IRONIC THAT THE VERY NAME "VETERANS STADIUM," WHICH WAS USED TO PACIFY THE PUBLIC OVER THE INITIAL TAXPAYER FUNDING OF THAT STADIUM, AND IN A WAY DID SERVE AS A TOKEN HONOR TO OUR VETERANS, WAS ITSELF SOLD OFF TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER THIS TIME AROUND.

AND MORE RECENTLY, RIGHT HERE IN HARRISBURG, WE HAVE JUST SPENT \$45 MILLION DOLLARS, MUCH OF IT TAXPAYER FUNDS, TO 'UPGRADE' A MINOR LEAGUE STADIUM.

AND HERE I MUST REPEAT...THE COST OF THE ONLY OUTREACH SERVICE FOR VETERANS IN PENNSYLVANIA, WAS ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR ALL FIVE CENTERS!

SENATOR BAKER, I ENJOY PROFESSIONAL SPORTS AS MUCH AS ANYONE. I WATCH OUR EAGLES AND STEELERS, AND OUR PHILLIES, EVERY CHANCE I GET. BUT I HAVE NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE REASONING BEHIND THE NEED FOR TAXPAYERS TO PAY FOR THESE OPERATIONS WHICH ARE SO WEALTHY IN THEIR OWN RIGHT.

THERE ARE OVER ONE MILLION VETERANS IN PENNSYLVANIA, AND I SAFELY VENTURE THE MAJORITY OF THEM WILL NEVER SET FOOT IN THE PROFESSIONAL SPORTS STADIUMS FOR WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN TAXED. AND IN CONTRAST, MANY OF OUR OLDER VETERANS, LIMITED IN MOBILITY FOR ONE REASON OR OTHER, NEVER SET FOOT IN THE VETERANS OUTREACH CENTERS EITHER

THIS WAS A UNIQUE SERVICE THAT INSTEAD WAS ABLE TO COME TO THEM WHEN NECESSARY...TO THEIR HOME...TO THEIR NURSING CARE FACILITY...TO WHEREVER THEY WERE. AND BECAUSE OF THE LONG-TERM EXPERIENCE, AND PERSONAL DEDICATION, OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THESE CENTERS, SUCH AS RON PENNYPACKER AND BRIAN MORRIS, OUR VETERANS WERE AFFORDED THE VERY BEST SERVICE TO WHICH THEY ARE ENTITLED.

I AM BUT ONE VOICE, AND THIS IS BUT ONE ISSUE BEFORE THIS COMMITTEE. THAT IS WHY I HAVE FRAMED MY ARGUMENTS IN SIMPLE TERMS: TREAT OUR VETERANS WITH THE SAME RESPECT AND PRIORITY AS WE TREAT PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES.

FIND THAT ONE MILLION DOLLARS SOMEWHERE TO RESTORE THE OUTREACH CENTERS AND I FOR ONE WILL BE WELL SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS. SO TOO WILL THE VETERANS WHO LIVE IN YOUR DISTRICTS. THANK YOU AGAIN FOR ALLOWING ME TO MAKE THIS POINT IN BEHALF OF MY FELLOW VETERANS.