

SEN. SAXBY CHAMBLISS (R-GA): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And gentleman thank you, first of all for being here, your excellent testimony this morning, but thanks for what you do -- thanks for being concerned about our brave men and women who wear the uniform, and please convey our thoughts and prayers to the secretary. Gee, what did you all do to him over there, rough morning at the Pentagon, huh? Well, actually it was pretty slippery in my neighborhood, too. But tell him we're thinking about him.

Let me thank all of you for your efforts over the last year to improve our health care and transition programs for our wounded warriors. I've personally seen how the warrior transition units and our health care professionals have made great strides in caring for and treating our wounded service members. I've been to both Fort Gordon, I've been to Fort Benning where I've seen firsthand what's happening with respect to our men and women who are coming back with injuries. We're doing a great job of helping them reintegrate into the military and the community, and I appreciate the hard work each of you have done to get us to this point.

I note in Secretary England's statement that he focuses on the recovery coordination program. This program is designed to identify and integrate care and service for wounded service members, veterans and their families, obviously, establishing recovery coordinators to serve as the patient's and family's single point of contact during their recovery and transition period was discussed in the number one recommendation of the Dole-Shalala commission, and I'm pleased to see that the department is taking steps to implement this very important recommendation.

Training for the recovery coordinators is obviously very important if they're going to perform their jobs effectively. Augusta, Georgia has developed a very unique collaboration in the area of wounded warrior care. The city of Augusta is home to the Eisenhower Medical Center at Fort Gordon. Formerly operated on the great leadership of General Schoomaker, and -- we miss you there.

Your successor, General Bradshaw is certainly doing a great job. But part of what I'm going to talk about here, and ask you about, is something that began under your leadership, and we thank you for your continued attention to the care for our wounded warriors.

It's home to the, also the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center and the Medical College of Georgia, particularly the School of Nursing, these three institutions are already collaborating in the treatment of wounded warriors and the Charlie Norwood VA hosts the only active duty rehab facility for military personnel in a VA medical center.

The Medical College of Georgia School of Nursing has an existing program for training and certifying clinical nurse leaders. These clinical nurse leaders are basically the civilian equivalent of DOD's wounded warrior recovery coordinators and perform many of the same task.

As a means of extending the collaboration and treatment of wounded warriors in the Augusta area, the Medical College of Georgia School of Nursing has proposed a short certificate program which would take advantage of classes and faculty already resident in their clinical nurse leader program to help train and certify DOD's recovery coordinators.

I understand from statements from several of you that DOD is conducting some training, including web-based training, for your recovery coordinators. But I'm wondering if you had considered taking advantage of this proposal that the Medical College of Georgia is offering to determine if it could be an effective means of helping to train your recovery coordinators, and if it would provide a value-added addition to the Department's establishment of a wounded warrior recovery program.

And I'll direct that to whoever wants to respond first. But Dr. Chu --

MR. CHU: We always value new ideas. We'd be delighted to look at this one.

SEN. CHAMBLISS: Mr. Mansfield.

MR. MANSFIELD: Sir, I would add that it's interesting you mentioned Fort Gordon because we have at the present time a program with VA and DOD that goes back, I think, to 2004 where the VA is actually doing rehab for active-duty soldiers down there. So that cooperative effort is already in place down there and we can look at going forward, and as Dr. Chu mentioned, doing something new and better.

SEN. CHAMBLISS: Anyone else have a comment?

Well, I know that the personnel at the Medical College of Georgia School of Nursing would be willing to modify their proposal in order to meet any specific training requirements as well as the necessary timeframe the DOD might require for training their recovery coordinators, and whatever will be helpful to the department and the college. From a discussion standpoint these folks are ready, willing to offer any services necessary. And General Schoomaker, you know firsthand the great job that Dr. Rahm (ph) and the folks over at the medical college do, as well as the folks at the VA medical center.

I've had the pleasure of visiting any number of our patients there at the VA center over the last several years, and the work that we're doing particularly with our severely injured folks is truly amazing there. And thanks again, General Schoomaker, for your leadership in that role at Eisenhower in establishing it. It's certainly the premier, in my opinion, recovery unit for our wounded warriors out there.

MR. SCHOOMAKER: Thank you, sir. And, frankly, I get the credit for the terrific work of the team at the Augusta VA Medical Center and at Eisenhower. We had a very farsighted group in both the communities who recognized very early in the war that the nature of the injuries our soldiers, and sailors, airmen, marines were suffering, the long experience that the Augusta VA Medical Center and many VAs throughout the system

have in rehabilitative medicine, especially with blind, and deaf, and traumatic brain injury, and posttraumatic stress disorder, which Secretary Mansfield has talked about already, I think that was resident within those communities. And they reached out to us just as we reached to them, and we have a very -- we continue to have a very, very collegial and cooperative relationship.

It's important to note that this was built on a relationship and corporative agreements that go back in neurosurgery, that go back in cardiothoracic surgery between the two organizations which set the framework for what we have there today. And we really truly support -- appreciate the support that you have given to this, that Senator Isakson has given us, the Congressman Norwood -- the late Charlie Norwood gave to it, and now Congressman Brown give to that.

Senator Inhofe said something earlier that I think is very important. And that is that his own -- the revelation, the epiphany that he has experienced in going back into the VA system and saying that this is such a high-quality system, that insight, frankly, is one that all of our soldiers and their families needs to recognize.

And relationships such as what we have at the Augusta VA Medical Center, but all are polytrauma units, if you've been to see them, tell us everyday as well. It allows our soldiers and families, even if they come back into uniform, fully recovered and rehabilitated, it gives them an insight into what the VA medical system provides for them and much greater confidence through working knowledge with the VA. So these kinds of relationships are just absolutely fundamental. Thank you, sir.

SEN. CHAMBLISS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SEN. LEVIN: Senator Chambliss, thank you.