

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JOHN CULBERSON
VETERANS AFFAIRS
FY 2012 BUDGET HEARING
SECRETARY ERIC K. SHINSEKI
MARCH 16, 2011

Secretary Shinseki, it is a pleasure and honor to welcome a general with such a distinguished military record to this subcommittee. We are very pleased that you accepted the call out of retirement to serve your fellow veterans as head of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The recent death of Frank Buckles, the last known living American veteran of the First World War, is a poignant reminder of the long term commitment the VA makes to our service members. I understand you still provide survivor benefits for two survivors of veterans of the Civil War!

All Members of this subcommittee and indeed the Congress share your dedication to ensuring that veterans receive the high quality assistance they have earned with their service. But we also recognize that the current weak economy and the staggering deficit facing the nation force us to consider carefully every dollar we spend, even for veterans. Mr. Bishop and I sent you a letter before the FY 2012 budget was released asking you to suggest to us ways to cut the VA budget without affecting patient care. We received your response this week, which basically repeated proposals you had already made in the FY 2012 budget request. Depending on the budget allocation this subcommittee receives, we may need to come back to you for additional savings ideas.

We'll be interested to hear you describe the highlights of your FY 2012 budget request.

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