

The Department has provided training to VA employees across the country on the updated criteria. Its initial outreach included talking to healthcare providers also about the changes.

There are still parts of the VA MISSION Act that have not yet been enacted, but so far, I am pleased with the rollout. My colleagues and I on the Senate VA Committee take our oversight responsibility very seriously. We will continue to closely follow the implementation and be ready to fix issues that may arise along the way so we can be sure that benefits are delivered as they were promised. The responsibility to ensure funding for community care programs falls to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs.

As the chairman, I will continue working to fully fund the expansion of community care, and I look forward to support from my colleagues to provide the necessary resources to ensure this program's success.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. BRAUN. Mr. President, my hometown of Jasper, IN, sits in the county with the most veterans per capita in the State. My father was a tail gunner on a B-17 himself, and I will never forget the lesson he and my community impressed upon me of honoring those who have served so effortlessly and selflessly.

Providing for the health and well-being of the men and women who have sacrificed so much for our country is the least we can do, and it ought to be one of the things we can all agree on in this Chamber.

When the Trump administration took over, the VA had been in dire straits for many years. The passage of the MISSION Act represented a great stride toward improving access to quality healthcare services for our vets and, especially, a great step for Hoosier veterans.

A few of the valuable provisions for Hoosier veterans in the MISSION Act include these: replacing the mileage requirement with a drive time requirement; greatly expanding access to care for Hoosier veterans who report to VA hospitals in bigger cities like Chicago, Indianapolis, Louisville, and Cincinnati; reducing the maximum wait times and reducing the strain on smaller VA facilities that may not have the resources or specialties available to serve patients in a timely manner; implementing a new urgent care benefit so veterans can now utilize urgent care and walk-in facilities from providers in the VA network without prior authorization; and a big win for access to care for Hoosier vets, allowing veterans to seek out community care if the VA medical service line is unable to meet quality standards.

Before this legislation, Hoosier veterans not receiving proper care would have nowhere else to turn. The MIS-

SION Act offers Hoosier veterans better choices, better access, and better care.

As we reflect on the sacrifice of our servicemen and servicewomen this upcoming Fourth of July season, we must also remember our commitment to them once they return from the field of battle. We have made great strides in improving access and quality for veteran care in the last 2 years, and the MISSION Act is a big win for Hoosiers and all American veterans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, 1 year ago, we came together not as Republicans or Democrats but as Americans. We passed a major milestone for our veterans. The bipartisan VA MISSION Act brought us a step closer to fulfilling our obligation to care for our men and women who serve in uniform.

In Montana we have one of the highest veteran per capita populations in the United States, and the issue of access to veteran healthcare is one that I hear across every corner of our State.

My dad is a U.S. marine. I am proud we were able to get this important bill signed into law. The VA MISSION Act will help fix many of the problems plaguing the VA Choice Program. The veterans across our rural communities in Montana will have greater and more convenient access to care. Telemedicine services will be strengthened to accommodate those who live a long ways away from traditional hospitals or health clinics. Oversight of opioid prescriptions will be strengthened. There will be greater accountability in how companies manage this new program.

It will help fill the VA's medical professional shortage through scholarship and loan repayment programs for medical and dental students who commit to serving in the VA. The MISSION Act was an important step forward, and I am proud to have helped get this bill across the finish line and onto President Trump's desk.

Now we must hold the VA and the program administrators accountable for ensuring the MISSION Act works for our veterans. I will be in constant contact with local VA leaders and veterans themselves to get firsthand feedback as this is implemented.

As we celebrate this important milestone, we must not slow down our efforts to continue to improve our veterans' healthcare. I look forward to continuing to work on behalf of our veterans and build off the good work that was accomplished here last year. We must ensure that veterans in Montana and across our Nation receive the care they have earned. I am honored to fight this fight for the brave men and the brave women who served in uniform.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

JUNETEENTH

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about Juneteenth and the VA MISSION Act.

The VA MISSION Act is a remarkable transition that is happening right now in VA centers across the country, but I need to pause for just a moment in recognition of today's date.

Today, as many people here in the Senate know—and if they don't know, they should know—today is June 19. In the South today, we recognize it as Juneteenth.

The Emancipation Proclamation was signed by Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, but it took 2 years for that information about the emancipation of the slaves to reach multiple areas of the South. The date that was officially recognized was June 19, and that is the day we recognize each year—June 19—as Emancipation Day. In Oklahoma, in my great State, it actually didn't reach us until June 14, 1866—almost a year after it reached Texas. That is how long communication took at the time, to get the information.

It is a remarkable thing to think about. One hundred and fifty-four years after emancipation reached the Southern States and the word of that reached them and after the end of the Civil War, we still as a nation pause on June 19 every year to remember how horrible it was to treat humanity as property. May we not forget where we were so we never get close to that again.

VA MISSION ACT

Mr. President, I also came to talk about the VA. In 2014, a scandal broke at the VA in Phoenix, and the entire Nation paused for a moment and saw what was happening at the Phoenix VA and saw how broken the healthcare system was.

There have been some very significant changes since that time period. The Veterans Choice and Accountability Act was passed, giving veterans the opportunity to get access to healthcare if it was backed up and slow at their own VA health center. If they couldn't get there within 30 days to see someone, then they would have the opportunity to see someone in their local area. If it was a long distance to get there, they weren't required to drive long distances from rural areas to get to an urban VA center. That passed with the Veterans Choice Act, and that was the beginning point of reform in the VA centers.

There were lots of problems in the Choice Act in the very beginning—getting access to doctors, doctors getting paid. How far is the distance? Is it based on mileage on the road, or is it as the crow flies? There were all kinds of things that got worked out in the first year or so. Within the first year, we started seeing veterans getting access to care closer to home and faster, but early on in that success, we also realized there was a need for major changes.

Not long after that, this Congress passed reform to hiring and firing at