

## **The Honorable Nancy L. Johnson**

### **Testimony before the Subcommittee on Health of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

**March 19, 2003**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me to speak here today on a major obstacle our nation's veterans face in obtaining comprehensive health care and access to prescription drugs.

According to the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the VA pharmacy benefit is the primary reason that veterans without service-connected disabilities use VA healthcare services. Nearly 90 percent of these veterans have access to private health care and private physicians, yet they wait in lengthy lines at the VA in order to be re-examined and re-tested so they can receive their prescription drugs through the VA. This causes veterans with a prescription already in hand to wait weeks, even months before it is filled and creates a backlog of veterans waiting for doctor appointments.

My legislation, which I introduced last Congress, would ease the process by which veterans with private health insurance or Medicare coverage obtain prescription drugs through the VA healthcare system. Specifically, it would allow an eligible veteran, with a prescription written by a private physician, to fill that prescription at a VA pharmacy from the current VA formulary. My legislation differs from other prescription drug access proposals because it specifically limits the prescriptions to drugs listed under the VA formulary in order to limit the cost of implementation. Under current law, the VA does not have the authority to dispense prescriptions written by private sector physicians.

As chairman of the Ways & Means health subcommittee, I recognize the unique challenge that the VA faces in its mission to provide comprehensive quality health care service to veterans. However, strict adherence to that same mission has resulted in lengthy delays in the delivery of quality care to both veterans with private health coverage and those veterans that are entirely dependant on the VA as their healthcare provider. In order to ensure timely delivery of health care, the VA must focus on the barriers veterans face in receiving care including streamlining access to prescription drugs.