

We had many, many hearings. It is really a miracle of compression to put together the 1,400 recommendations that we had.

I want to say to you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Congress and the committee, after the hearings were over and the testimony was in and we were sitting, in effect, as a kind of a jury, that it was a real revelation to me that we could bring it together and bring it to you.

These recommendations in this document represent the feelings of the 25 million veterans in the United States. These are the problems they face. These are the solutions they ask us for. The older veterans came to us and said, "You tell the Congress and the President we are in an area where we need help."

So, Mr. Chairman, it was a great privilege for me to serve on the Commission and to come out of it at the end of the year, not only aware of the problems of the service connected, but of all the veterans.

It has been a privilege to appear before this committee.

Mr. McCURDY. Mr. Chairman, Melvin Dixon, the State director of Veterans' Affairs for the State of Florida, is unfortunately ill. He was an extremely strong member of our Commission and we regret his absence today. He made very notable contributions to the work of the committee.

I would like to present Mr. Ralph E. Hall of Maryland, the past national commander of AMVETS.

Mr. HALL. Mr. Chairman, gentlemen, Mrs. Heckler, I think we would probably all be less than honest with ourselves if we didn't agree that when this Commission was founded initially there were very grave reservations as to what would actually result from the findings of this Commission.

I think we were accused of being a rubber stamp for the VA, that we would be under the influence of your committee. I think if you talk with any of the staff members of the VA, if you talk with the people who were there during our discussions with the VA, you will find that this was definitely not true. The Commission just did not buy their suggestions. We just literally digested everything that they gave to us as guidance and formed our own conclusions.

I think your committee also will be justly proud of the work that was done by this Commission. I think that the report is going to be a milestone in veteran legislation for many, many years to come.

We could not possibly have gone through the testimony that we received and not come up with something that will be of profound impact on veteran legislation. I think when you do have the opportunity to fully digest what this report does have to say, that you will agree, too, that this Commission was an entirely unbiased Commission, not influenced by anybody except the testimony from the grassroots.

I think you will be very, very proud of the report, as we certainly are as members of the Commission.

Thank you.

Mr. McCURDY. I would like to present Mr. Herbert Houston of Tennessee, who is the past national commander of the Veterans of World War I.