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For Immediate Release:

**Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission visits VA and DoD facilities in Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida.**

ST. PETERSBURG, Florida — Members of the Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission recently visited local Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities near Tampa/St. Petersburg and MacDill Air Force Base (AFB) to gain first-hand knowledge of what veterans and service members encounter in their efforts to obtain disability benefits.

"It's important that we [the Commissioners] understand how VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) transition veterans; review and process claims; and respond to veterans' needs at the local level," said Chairman James Terry Scott. "We want to ensure that everything is done to provide our veterans with the appropriate avenues to receive the benefits they have earned serving our country."

This was the first of eight fact-finding site visits throughout the United States that the Commission is conducting. These specific sites were selected based on criteria that included the concentration of veterans, active-duty service members and National Guard and Reserves, and the location of VA and DoD facilities, with particular interest in transition activities.

On the first two days of the three-day visit, the 13-member Commission toured the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office, and the James A. Haley (Tampa) and the Bay Pines VA medical centers. The Commissioners participated in small group information-gathering work sessions and received briefings about the day-to-day operations of each facility. There was time set aside to interact directly with the staff members who are involved in the disability claims process, as well as individuals receiving in and outpatient rehabilitation and involved in various phases of the disability assessment and compensation process.

The Commissioners also visited MacDill AFB, where they received briefings on the coordination and communication of VA benefits and services from military and VA personnel. Chairman Scott provided a brief overview of the Commission's charter and the purpose of the visit. Transition Assistance and Disability Transition Assistance Programs (TAP and DTAP), casualty assistance and family support, and Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) personnel, along with OEF/OIF coordinators and participants from the Community Based Health Care Initiative and the Medical Holdover System were among those who participated in discussions with the Commissioners. The partnerships, sharing and joint agreements that are in place to facilitate the transitioning of service

members were highlighted, when Commissioners raised questions regarding key operational challenges, communication with VA medical centers, and the coordination of benefits.

“VA and DoD need to work in tandem to transition our service members to veterans’ status—especially those recently disabled who need medical and vocational assistance,” Scott remarked. “The Commission was established to assist in identifying ways to make this transition as smooth as possible and one way to do this is by maximizing technology to electronically exchange medical and personnel records.” Efforts to ensure continuity of care and rehabilitation for the traumatically injured between DoD trauma centers, such as Walter Reed and Brooke Army Medical Centers, and VA were cited during this visit as major successes.

The Veterans’ Disability Benefits Commission, an independent, bipartisan body created by Public Law 108-136 and appointed by the President and leaders of Congress, mandated to study the benefits and services intended to compensate and assist veterans and their survivors for disabilities and deaths attributable to military service. The Commission is dedicated to conducting a thorough, objective, and impartial analysis of the full range of programs that are intended to meet the needs of disabled veterans and survivors.

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