

(FORT WORTH) - U.S. Representative Chet Edwards was in Fort Worth Friday to speak at the opening ceremony for the Fort Worth VA Outpatient Clinic. Edwards gave the following remarks as prepared for delivery:

“Good afternoon. It is a privilege to be here with so many who have done so much in service to our country. I would like to share with you just a few personal thoughts about while this new VA facility is important.

First, it is important, because it will mean better and more accessible health care for thousands of veterans from throughout North Texas. The old Fort Worth VA clinic is outdated, inefficient and undersized. This new, modern facility will allow veterans to receive more timely, quality and efficient care—the kind of care they have earned through their service to country. With the expanded and improved care offered here, many veterans will receive health care closer to their homes instead of having to make long drives to the Dallas VA hospital or elsewhere.

Second, I believe this VA facility is important, because it represents our nation’s moral obligation to stand up for those who have stood up for us. Protecting our nation is, and always should be, the first responsibility of the federal government. Those who go into harm’s way are

fulfilling a sacred duty, and it would be wrong to forget their sacrifices when they return home.

Third, I believe supporting our veterans is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. It is the right thing to do, because we should always keep our promises to those who have kept their promise to serve. It is the smart thing to do, because in a voluntary military force, today's young troops watch closely how we treat the troops of yesterday, our veterans. They know if our country breaks its commitments to our veterans, it can break its commitments to them. If that happens, we would lose the best and brightest in our all volunteer military force. So, keeping trust with our veterans is a key component of maintaining a strong national defense for today and tomorrow.

Fourth, this VA facility is important, because it is not only about better health care for our veterans, it is about respect. Having represented Ft. Hood, America's largest Army installation, through three combat deployments, I have seen up close and personally, the sacrifices our troops and their families make for our families in times of war and peace. They deserve our respect not just with our words on Veterans Day or Memorial Day but with our deeds every day. I hope every veteran who walks through these doors will see this facility and the services they receive here as a grateful nation's meaningful statement of respect.

I also want to thank and salute our dedicated VA employees. Your work is a noble calling, and I am deeply grateful for your dedication to our veterans and their health care. Without you, this building would be just that—a building. Thank you for giving our veterans your care and your love. My hope in the years to come is that this facility will stand not only as a statement of our nation's respect for our veterans but as a reminder that the physical and mental sacrifices of those who serve in uniform continue long after the troops come home. May God bless our troops, our veterans and their families, and may God always bless the land we love."

Since becoming the Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Committee in 2007, Edwards has led the unprecedented effort in Congress to increase funding for veterans' health care and benefits. That historic effort has resulted in a 75% increase to the Veterans Health Administration and an additional 3,389 doctors, 14,316 nurses, 145 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, 92 new Vet Centers, and 70 mobile Vet Centers. The historic funding has also enabled the Department of Veterans Affairs to add an additional 10,200 new VA benefits claims processors, resulting in a 70% increase in claims processed.