

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the House Appropriations Committee.

My name is Austen Schauer, representing District 13, West Fargo.

It is with great privilege that I ask for your support of the **ND Fisher House** (in the form of **HB 1157**) to be located near the VA Medical Center in Fargo.

The **Fisher House** was founded more than 30 years ago by Zachary and Elizabeth Fisher who were in the construction business.

They were at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. and noticed families of veterans sleeping overnight on couches, chairs and in their vehicles while their loved ones were being treated for serious medical injuries.

This was **unacceptable** for the Fishers. This would be unacceptable to North Dakota.

Since that time, 88 **Fisher Houses** have been built in the United States and U.S. military bases around the world but **not** here in our state.

The VA Medical Center in Fargo has the **largest footprint** in the country serving North Dakota, 18 counties in Minnesota and one county in South Dakota.

Some veterans and their families travel more than **300 miles** to the Fargo VA.

The VA provides **medical help**. The **Fisher House** provides **housing help**.

The **Fisher House** serves **military families** who have sacrificed for their country by staying home **without** a spouse for long periods of time.

This is **their** contribution to our country's freedom and liberties.

The **Fisher House** is like a **Ronald McDonald House** for military families.

The families receive free lodging while their loved ones undergo treatment or surgery for **serious illnesses**.

In addition, the **Fisher House** provides a place of **support** and **comfort** as military families can share stories with other families going through similar difficult times.

The **Fisher House** is an **\$8 to \$9 million dollar** project with more than **\$7 million** raised privately and **\$500 thousand** from the federal government. (ARPA).

All the money raised goes to the building of the House.

Once construction has ended, the **Fisher House** is owned and funded by the federal government through the Veterans Administration.

The size of the **Fisher House** will be around **15 thousand square feet**.

There will be **15 to 16 family suites** with a full kitchen, and a large gathering room for families to visit.

To be sure, it is older veterans in need of critical care at the VA.

However, the VA is also seeing more and more younger veterans; those who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan.

They too need help, and their families also need a home away from home.

The ask from us to you is **\$500 thousand dollars** which will put us in position to begin construction within the next 18 months.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and committee members.

I am open for questions.

