

**TRANSCRIPT:**

**SENATOR BARBARA MIKULSKI (MD 3<sup>RD</sup> DISTRICT)**

**SENATOR MIKULSKI EXCERPT ON COMMISSARIES**

**HEARING TO REVIEW FY17 BUDGET REQUEST**

**FOR THE DEFENSE HEALTH PROGRAM**

**APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE SD-192**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

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**Transcript: Senator Mikulski**

Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing on Defense Health  
March 9, 2016 – 10:30am EST

MIKULSKI: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on the Department of Defense health program appropriations request. It's one of my favorite hearings because it goes right to the heart of the active duty military, the retired military and their families. And we hear how this benefit is essential to meet our obligations to those serving and in the line of fire.

And then their families you don't only send someone to war. Their family is involved as well, and so we always look forward to hearing what they're doing and how we can help them do it effectively and have meaning in the lives of our people.

I want to thank you all for your service, for what you do every day in terms of ensuring this delivery of service. And Mr. Miller, you too have been in kind of your own line of fire with the minefields of interoperability.

Mr. Chairman, we're very proud of military medicine in Maryland. We are the home to Walter Reed, Naval Bethesda and anyone who hasn't visited I really encourage you to come and see this spectacular institution meeting the needs of our military. It's the home of a medical school, USUS. Admiral Faison, you served there.

And we also have our relationships like with the Air Force residency program where we use institutions in our state, the University of Maryland Shock Trauma is involved with you and the Air Force surgical residency program, and they're delighted with it. And also when we look at Fort Detrick that does very important research in protecting us from biological and chemical warfare and then also helping with other research activities too classified to talk about here.

And then its work in extramural research. We were so pleased that Johns Hopkins was able to get a grant to do some -- to do something that was almost like a moonshot in the survival of amputees in which they actually, gentlemen, did a limb transplant to a military man, Brian, who lost both arms, and they did a limb transplant.

This man has the use of his arms. He has the use of his hands. He might not be able to play a concerto, but he can play ball with his child and he can be involved in the workforce. He can feel like a human being and live fully. And it was important, not only for those who bear these permanent wounds of war, but the research also showed you didn't have rejection, you know, the whole thing about a transplant is the whole drug regime.

So we're really proud of what goes on there, and I want to thank you because I think it accrues to our military population and our civilian population. So we want to thank you for what you do and don't forget Maryland when I'm not here.

So but also, you know, just the volume and velocity of 55 hospitals, 360 clinics, 147 (sic) employees, it's just amazing what you do. But let me get to my questions. It goes to readiness and resiliency. Readiness and resiliency and that's what you all talked about.

I was so pleased to hear that you're using complementary modalities in integrative health and would like to encourage you, but let me get to where I think the military and their families should be well-fed. I feel like I'm at war with the DOD budgeteers over the -- over the shrinking of commissaries.

***My question to you is this. Are you aware that they're trying to cut the commissary budget, that nobody's paying attention to something called the Healthy Base Initiative? Are you aware of that?***

***General West, are -- you are?***

Admiral?

***MIKULSKI: And with Jessica Wright (ph) going it's kind of wandering in the wilderness. This initiative is twofold. One, use the commissary to introduce fruits and vegetables, also to be able to enable the commissary to do things like farmers' markets which my garrison commander at Fort Meade tells me has been really a building where officer corps and enlisted corps and so on across the ranks are mingling.***

And then also the way you change you feed active duty military. Nobody wanted to eat at Fort Meade until they had the Healthy Base Initiative. They were serving liver and onions at like 3 o'clock in the afternoon and wondering why was everybody running to Burger King?

So what do you think? Don't you think the Army runs on its stomach and the Army ought -- and the military ought to help them? And could you all mount a battle with the budgeteers and help out these families?

WEST: Absolutely.

MIKULSKI: And how are you going to say no to me on this? I mean...  
(LAUGHTER)

WEST: That's right. Absolute. That's right, absolutely, Senator, and I appreciate your efforts of ensuring that Fort Meade along with Bragg and Fort Sill, which are the other -- that other installations that are in the Health Base Initiative.

And absolutely there were some initiatives just to change the placement in our dining facilities, putting salads up front, putting more healthy foods closer so you had to pass by them before you got to some of the more unhealthy choices. It really made a difference in the selection of more healthy choices. So just placement and all those initiatives ensuring that on our installations we...

MIKULSKI: No, I know what they do.

WEST: Right.

**MIKULSKI: I'm afraid that it's not going to survive. Are you aware that in the budget they're cutting commissaries again?**

**WEST: I'm unaware of the specific cut. I know that was something that was (inaudible)...**

**MIKULSKI: Well, I say that really to...**

**WEST: ... to benefit, but...**

**MIKULSKI: ... the three of you. OK? And commissaries in some ways are nutritional settlement house.**

**WEST: Yeah. So we...**

**MIKULSKI: You're nodding your head, Admiral?**

**FAISON: Ma'am, I was not aware of the commissary initiative. I will tell you with Healthy Base Initiative bill that we have taken the principles from that and exported that across our Navy. And in our Navy on ships we have a long tradition of an order called sliders. They're burgers. We've replaced those...**

**MIKULSKI: Oh, I know what those are.**

**FAISON: So we've replaced those. I personally just made a video this week on the importance of activity and proper eating and things like that. So we're taking those initiatives and exporting those across the Navy and the Marine Corps because it does lead to better health. Obesity is a challenge in our nation right now. And it...**

**MIKULSKI: But it is about readiness and...**

**FAISON: Exactly.**

**MIKULSKI: ... prevention.**

**FAISON:** Yes, ma'am, absolutely.

**COCHRAN:** The Senator's time has expired.

**EDIGER:** Yes, Senator, we are aware that there have been discussions in terms of the commissary benefit and changes to that in the interest of saving costs. Through our health promotion programs, we're focused on anticipating how we can better deliver information and knowledge to the families that we support in terms of helping nutrition, understanding that where they actually purchase their food may change over time. But we agree the commissary is a great opportunity for us to deliver information and encourage families in terms of the health -- healthy choices.

**MIKULSKI:** Check it out and help me out. My time has expired. And thank you once again. We love in you in Maryland, and we love what you do every day to help our military and its families.