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March 24, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave.,
Washington D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I am writing to request that you take direct action and involvement in ending the current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims backlog.

Returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans frequently encounter lengthy processing delays when submitting claims to the VA. Once a veteran has submitted a claim for disability compensation, the VA has 125 days to process it before it is considered backlogged. As of March 1, 2014, the VA was tracking a total of 377,942 backlogged claims.

The average claims process wait for Pennsylvanian Veterans is between 309 and 347 days. In the worst cases, veterans have waited and continue to wait 800 days, 900 days, and even more than 1000 days for a disability claims decision from the VA. This is simply unacceptable. After a decade of war, we must make sure our country takes care of our own, especially those who have put their life on the line.

Congress has been willing to supply VA with everything it has asked for in terms of more funding and more employees. An increase in funding has not proven to help those that deserve it the most, those who have committed their life to serving our nation. During the last four years, the number of claims pending for more than a year has grown by over 2000%, despite a 40% increase in the VA's budget. Solving this problem is critical for veterans of all generations fulfilling our promises we have made to these great Americans.

As a veteran myself, I am grateful for the service of these men and women and rejoice in their safe return. We must remain committed to ensuring our obligation and promise to helping all who have served. I respectfully ask you and your administration to find a solution that ensures that no veterans are stuck in the VA backlog.

Thank you for your quick attention and consideration of this matter,

Sincerely,

Joseph Pitts

Member of Congress
Joseph. R. Pitts (PA-16)

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