

DAVID LOEBSACK

2ND DISTRICT, IOWA

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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
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July 10, 2012

The Honorable Eric Shinseki  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

Last week, I met with Iowa Veterans, military family members, and Veterans service providers across eastern and southeastern Iowa. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the concerns I heard from the Veterans I represent and urge you to take these concerns into account when considering improvements to Veterans services.

### **Disability Claims**

Almost every Veteran I spoke with expressed great concern and disappointment at the time it takes for the VA to process both initial disability claims and claims appeals. I strongly share their dismay at the current process. Between 2007-2010, I worked on a bipartisan basis to provide a 70% increase in VA funding, including funding to hire 10,200 new claims processors. I understand that the VA is working to move to a paperless claims process in order to expedite processing. However, the claims backlog continues to grow. I have worked with many Iowa Veterans to help them navigate the claims process; however, many Iowa Veterans are still waiting years in some cases to see their claim resolved. Especially in these tough economic times, this delay often creates significant financial, health, and emotional distress for our Veterans.

I respectfully request that you provide me with specific actions the VA plans to take to reduce the backlog; an update on the status of implementation of new processing technology; and information about how the VA is working to improve the accuracy of claims processing in order to reduce inaccurate denials or findings. I also request information regarding any legislative action that you believe is necessary in order to assist the VA in reducing the backlog in claims.

### **VA Health Care**

Veterans also raised concerns with me regarding the VA's policies regarding covering ambulance calls not made by the VA. Additionally, the Veterans I met with were very concerned about the length of time they often must wait for an appointment at a VA medical facility and expressed interest in being able to see a physician outside of the VA health system to reduce both driving time to VA facilities and the length of time they must wait to be seen. While I know that the vast majority of VA medical facility staff work to put the best interests of Veterans first, I was distressed to hear concerns raised about the professionalism and level of respect shown by some VA staff toward patients visiting VA facilities.

I therefore request information regarding how the VA determines when to cover ambulance services. I also request information about the average length of time Iowa Veterans must wait to be seen at a VA medical facility in Veterans Integration Service Network (VISN) 23; the average distance Iowa Veterans must travel to a VA facility; and any plans to decrease the length of time Veterans must wait for an appointment.

**Job Training**

In addition, last week I met with Iowa Veterans receiving job training services. Many of these Veterans have struggled to transition to the civilian workforce and some are facing homelessness. I remain convinced that job training is a crucial component in helping our Veterans secure good jobs and was proud to strongly support the VOW to Hire Heroes Act to expand these benefits. I look forward to continuing to work in support of improving these programs and respectfully request information regarding any legislative support the VA requires in order to further improve transition services.

I strongly urge you to take my constituents' concerns into account as you work to improve VA services. I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that every person who has served our nation in uniform receives the care, benefits, and respect they deserve.

Sincerely,



Dave Loeb sack  
Iowa's Second District

CC:

Mr. Danny Pummill  
Executive Director, Compensation & Pension Service  
Veterans Benefits Administration

Ms. Joan Mooney  
Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs