

## REPUBLICANS

JEFF MILLER, FLORIDA, CHAIRMAN

DOUG LAMBORN, COLORADO  
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, FLORIDA  
DAVID P. ROE, TENNESSEE  
BILL FLORES, TEXAS  
JEFF DENHAM, CALIFORNIA  
JON RUNYAN, NEW JERSEY  
DAN BENISHEK, MICHIGAN  
TIM HUELSKAMP, KANSAS  
MARK E. AMODEI, NEVADA  
MIKE COFFMAN, COLORADO  
BRAD R. WENSTRUP, OHIO  
PAUL COOK, CALIFORNIA  
JACKIE WALORSKI, INDIANAHELEN W. TOLAR, STAFF DIRECTOR  
AND CHIEF COUNSEL

## DEMOCRATS

MICHAEL H. MICHAUD, MAINE, RANKING

CORRINE BROWN, FLORIDA  
MARK TAKANO, CALIFORNIA  
JULIA BROWNLEY, CALIFORNIA  
DINA TITUS, NEVADA  
ANN KIRKPATRICK, ARIZONA  
RAUL RUIZ, CALIFORNIA  
GLORIA NEGRETE MCLEOD, CALIFORNIA  
ANN M. KUSTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
BETO O'ROURKE, TEXAS  
TIMOTHY J. WALZ, MINNESOTANANCY DOLAN  
DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR**U.S. House of Representatives**

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

April 12, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel:

As you lead the Department of Defense in its tremendous operations, we write to underscore the importance of your continued and enhanced communication and collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs. In February 2013, DoD and VA mutually agreed on a plan of action to improve disability benefits claims processing for transitioning service members and veterans. The plan provides for DoD to begin the transfer of complete and certified Service Treatment Records (STRs) to VA immediately, with electronic transfer capabilities to be in place by December 31, 2013. This agreement has been represented by VA as a "game-changer" in enabling and improving its disability benefits claims system. Ultimately, this will allow VA to issue compensation to disabled veterans faster.

We support this joint initiative, and want to ensure that the resources required to execute it remain in place. The VA/DoD information paper codifying the agreement states that success is dependent upon approved Joint Initiative Funding for labor and hardware. We request that DoD confirm current funding approval, and, if necessary, coordinate with VA and this Congress to forecast and ensure this initiative's funding needs are met. We note that all concerns regarding funding of this initiative must be resolved promptly and in coordination with VA and this Congress.

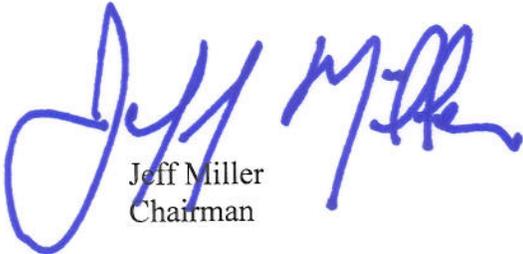
We learned that the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs wrote to you in recent days on this very same issue. This demonstrates that concern for our veterans and the effects of the disability claims backlog is both bipartisan and bicameral. The members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs echo the request of the Senate - that you work to strengthen DoD's existing partnership with VA as it improves its disability benefits claims system. As the Senate Committee noted, a seamless electronic transmission of records must be achieved and must include active duty service members as well as the Guard and Reserves. In upholding the promises made to this nation's service members and veterans, we will do all in our power to ensure the continued and enhanced partnership of DoD and VA.

The expectations of the American public, including the men and women who have worn the uniform, are reasonable. Veterans' disability benefits claims must be adjudicated in a timely and accurate manner and veterans must receive the benefits to which they are entitled. In the

VA/DoD information paper provided to the committee it states that a veteran waits, on average, over 250 days for decision on a disability benefits claim, In some locations the wait is considerably longer. In that period, the information paper also indicates that the veteran's claim sits stagnant for up to 175 days as VA awaits transfer of complete STRs from DoD. Thus, the necessity of DoD and VA's cooperation cannot be overstated. Claims processing of veterans' disability benefits simply will not achieve a satisfactory timeline until the process for transfer of records between DoD and VA is updated, improved, and streamlined.

As we highlight the importance of this DoD/VA initiative to provide for electronic transfer of complete and certified STRs, both for active duty and the Guard and Reserves, and the requisite inquiry into the adequacy of the program's Joint Initiative Funding, we also welcome your input as we work to fulfill our obligations to the men and women who have served this nation.

Sincerely,



Jeff Miller  
Chairman



Michael H. Michaud  
Ranking Member



Gus M. Bilirakis



Corrine Brown  
Corrine Brown



Doug Lamborn  
Doug Lamborn



Mark Takano  
Mark Takano



David P. Roe  
David P. Roe



Julia Brownley  
Julia Brownley



Bill Flores  
Bill Flores



Dina Titus  
Dina Titus



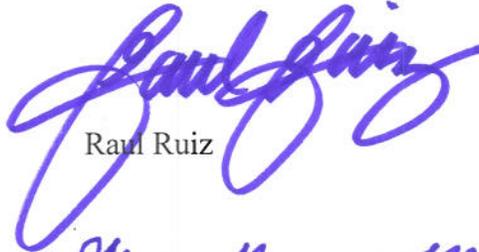
Jeff Denham



Ann Kirkpatrick



Jon Runyan



Raul Ruiz



Dan Benishek



Gloria Negrete McLeod



Tim Huelskamp



Ann McLane Kuster



Mark Amodei



Beto O'Rourke



Mike Coffman



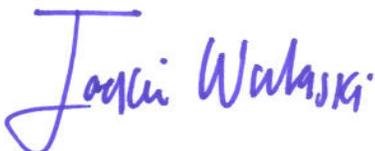
Tim Walz



Brad Wenstrup



Paul Cook



Jackie Walorski