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U.S. House of Representatives**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

May 13, 2014

The President of the United States of America
 The White House
 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
 Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to request your urgent attention in response to serious and systemic access-to-care issues plaguing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System and threatening the lives and well-being of our nation's honored veterans.

As I am sure you are aware, a recent House Committee on Veterans' Affairs investigation uncovered evidence suggesting that as many as 40 veterans may have died while waiting for care at the Phoenix VA Health Care System and that Phoenix VA Health Care System officials may have kept two separate waiting lists for veterans seeking care. Upon receipt of this information, I quickly informed the VA of these allegations in a public hearing, requested the preservation of all related documents and materials and asked the VA's Inspector General to conduct a full investigation into delays in care department wide.

Since news of the Phoenix allegations broke, reports have surfaced on a near-daily basis from veterans and whistleblowers across the country regarding delays in care, patient harm and administrative malfeasance on the part of VA officials throughout the nation.

On May 8, 2014, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs voted unanimously to issue a subpoena to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and other VA officials. You should know that the subpoena was prompted by the department's refusal to comply with my repeated requests for information regarding VA's admitted destruction of a document department officials have speculated may be the "secret" list cited by Phoenix VA Health Care System whistleblowers. The service of this subpoena is an unprecedented step, because until now, the committee has not served one during my chairmanship.

Also on May 8, 2014, the department notified Congress that VA will be initiating a nationwide access review in response to these alarming allegations. According to VA, this review will, "...ensure a full understanding of VA policy and continued integrity in managing patient access to care," and entail face-to-face audits at all VA clinics. However, given the gravity of the allegations surrounding the department and the issues and frustrations that continue to be raised by our veterans and their families as well as multiple VA whistleblowers, I have grave concerns

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about the ability and appropriateness of any internal investigation regarding these matters. As such, I respectfully request that you act immediately to establish an independent, bipartisan commission to thoroughly investigate veteran access issues, patient harm and preventable deaths as a result of delays in care across the VA health care system.

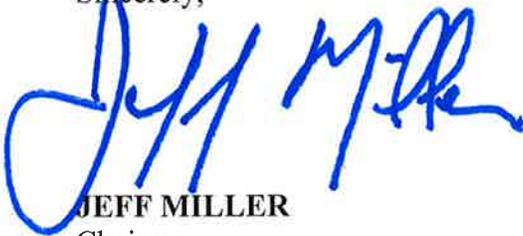
Though I greatly respect and appreciate the work being done by the VA OIG in Phoenix and other locations, I believe the allegations we are now seeing warrant action beyond the IG's current capabilities and resources. Further, there is precedent for establishing an independent commission in response to concerns regarding the care provided to our nation's servicemembers and veterans. In 2007, President Bush established "the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors," or, the Dole-Shalala Commission, in response to reports of substandard conditions and mismanagement at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The subsequent report and recommendations issued by the Dole-Shalala Commission have been critical to improving the health care, benefits, and services available to our nation's veterans in recent years.

Mr. President, a year has passed since I wrote to you requesting your involvement in addressing a rash of suicides, preventable deaths and other serious patient-care issues at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers around the country. Today, our veterans and your Department of Veterans Affairs require your personal attention more than ever before. I implore you to demand a swift and decisive resolution to the serious access issues plaguing the VA health care system and quickly convene a bipartisan commission on VA access and veteran harm as a result of delays in care.

I appreciate your commitment to our nation's veterans and stand ready to assist you in any way I can.

With warm personal regards, I am,

Sincerely,



JEFF MILLER
Chairman

CJM/jt