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June 12, 2013

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

VA's delayed acknowledgement of the loss of over 400,000 loan guaranty documents at the VA data center in Austin, Texas is further indication of the Department's lack of attention to the details of running a large data system.

It is my understanding that the loss occurred on May 24, 2013 and VA's first confirmation of the loss occurred on June 7, 2013 in a press release responding to a June 6, 2013 Federal Times article. That 14-day delay, in addition to the Department's failure to clarify some of what appear to be factual errors in the reporting, further diminishes my confidence in your Department's ability to manage its data systems and worse, to keep Congress informed of major data-related incidents.

So that the Committee can fully understand the scope of the loss, please provide us with responses to the following:

1. Why did it take 14 days for VA to acknowledge the data loss?
2. What types of data files were lost and how many of each type?
3. Was any Personally Identifiable Information lost? If so, for how many individuals?
4. Was the data lost through deletion, overwritten or did some "other" event occur leading to the loss? If an "other" event, please describe the event.
5. If overwritten, why aren't industry fail-safe standards and procedures part of the system?

6. How is it possible for one person to lose such an amount of data? Would you agree that a “two-man rule” would be appropriate to prevent such losses?
7. Please detail the procedures that have been implemented to prevent future losses such as this one and whether those procedures require more than one person to take action to delete similar amounts of data?
8. What will the loss of data result in?
 - a. How many mortgages will experience delayed closings?
 - b. How many Specially Adapted Housing applications – if any – will be delayed or need to be reinitiated?
 - c. Will the loss affect the interest rates on mortgages included in the loss?
 - d. What other impacts will the loss create?
9. How often was the data in question backed up and when was the most recent backup?
10. How often will the files be backed up in the future and where will the backed up files be stored?
11. Were the lost files recoverable from a backup storage site?

Mr. Secretary, thank you for your attention to this very serious matter. I would appreciate a response by June 30, 2013.

Sincerely,



Jeff Miller
Chairman

JM:mb