

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 5, 2006

Honorable R. James Nicholson
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave., NW (00)
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

We write today to express our outrage about how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) handled the loss of 26.5 million veterans' personal data on May 3, 2006. On Monday, May 22, 2006, the VA finally revealed the theft of veterans' names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers from the home of a VA employee who was not authorized to possess the data outside of his office.

Media reports indicate the VA waited TWO WEEKS to notify the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) of the May 3, 2006 theft. Even more inexcusable, the victims of this crime, our veterans, were not notified for 19 DAYS- almost three weeks- that this theft occurred. When it comes to the largest loss of personal data in U.S. government history, and perhaps what may be the second largest theft of personal data in U.S. history, it is unconscionable that the VA did not immediately notify the DOJ and the FBI. It is simply unfathomable the VA did not move as aggressively as possible to recover the stolen data. Surely, notifying the DOJ and FBI would be the obvious first step in any effort to track down the stolen information. This two-week delay has almost certainly hampered DOJ and FBI efforts and we will never know what leads or clues might have been discovered had federal law enforcement officials been contacted immediately.

Moreover, for 19 days our veterans were left totally exposed, unaware that their personal information had been compromised. Veterans were vulnerable to identity theft for almost three weeks, unable to take the necessary steps to protect themselves. In light of the severity of identity theft and the difficulty in correcting the problems associated with it, every day matters. The VA has done an enormous disservice to our veterans by not notifying them once the VA knew that their personal data had been compromised.

We demand the VA fully explain the aforementioned delays and lapses in judgment. The VA needs to clarify immediately what remedial actions are underway and what steps are being taken to avoid another similar disclosure in the future. The VA must both fully account to Congress, veterans, and the American people, how this awful failure occurred, and ensure it never happens again. We thank you in advance for your prompt reply to our concerns.

Sincerely,



Gary L. Ackerman
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress



Shelley Berkley
Member of Congress



Timothy H. Bishop
Member of Congress



Leonard L. Boswell
Member of Congress



Sherrod Brown
Member of Congress



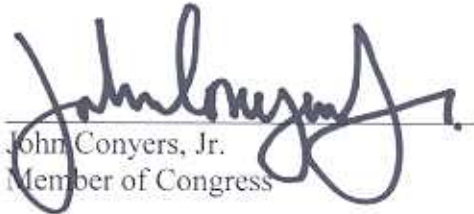
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Member of Congress



Ed Case
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Ben Chandler
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John Conyers, Jr.
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Jim Costa
Member of Congress



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Lloyd Doggett
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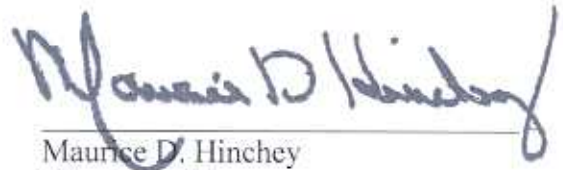
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Maurice D. Hinchey
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Rubén Hinojosa
Member of Congress



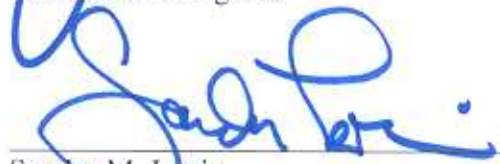
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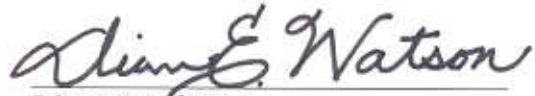
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