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

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

June 21, 2005

Honorable Jim Nicholson  
 Secretary  
 Department of Veterans Affairs  
 Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to express our serious concern with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) decision to require second review of grants for 100% ratings and Individual Unemployability, but not review denials of claims for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is troubling that the Inspector General's review focused on veterans whose claims had been granted at a rating of 50% or more and ignored the many cases in which the claim was denied. Many PTSD claims are denied without adequate attempts to verify the veteran's stressor. It is even more troubling that in response to the IG report, VA would require a second signature on allowed, but not denied, claims.

Mr. Secretary, this approach sends the wrong message to veterans who have been severely disabled by their exposure to traumatic events during World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also sends the wrong message to veterans who suffer from the disabling effects of non-combat stress, such as sexual trauma. A decision to require special review of grants but not denials of service-connection for PTSD tells our Nation's disabled veterans that this Administration is more concerned about the integrity of the public fisc than the health and well-being of those who have borne the battle.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a real disability diagnosed with reference to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fourth Edition) (DSM-IV). If VA were to utilize the recommendations of the "Best Practice Manual for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Compensation and Pension Examinations" and appropriately develop claims for "credible evidence" of in-service-stressors, many of the Inspector General's concerns could be appropriately addressed.

Honorable Jim Nicholson

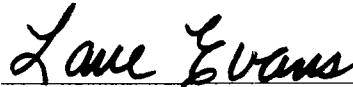
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The trust of our Nation's veterans in the fairness of VA's disability adjudication system has been severely challenged by reports of widespread disparity in disability ratings. An emphasis on reviewing only grants of benefits and not denials for PTSD and Individual Unemployability will further erode VA's credibility.

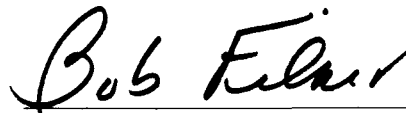
We strongly urge you to restore the trust of our Nation's disabled veterans by assuring that any review of service-connected compensation claims pays equal attention to grants and denials of such benefits. We would appreciate your providing a response to this letter by July 12, 2005. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Mary Ellen Mc Carthy, Democratic Staff Director, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs at 202-225-9756.

Sincerely,



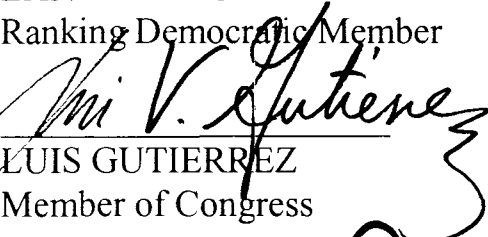
LANE EVANS

Ranking Democratic Member



BOB FILNER

Member of Congress



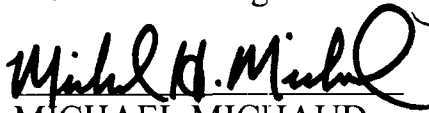
LUIS GUTIERREZ

Member of Congress



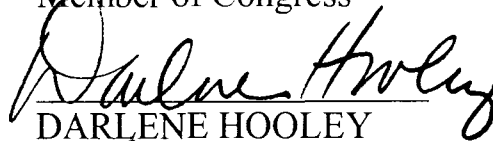
CORRINE BROWN

Member of Congress



MICHAEL MICHAUD

Member of Congress



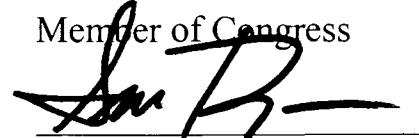
DARLENE HOOLEY

Member of Congress



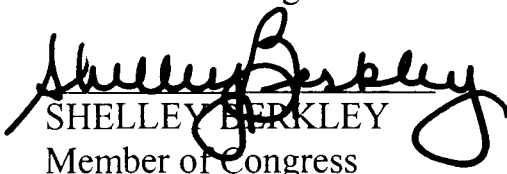
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Member of Congress



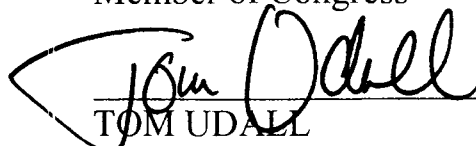
SILVESTRE REYES

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STEPHANIE HERSETH  
Member of Congress