

RICHARD J. DURBIN
ILLINOIS

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

ASSISTANT DEMOCRATIC
FLOOR LEADER

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-1304

December 3, 2004

332 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BLDG.
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304
(202) 224-2152
TTY (202) 224-8180

230 SOUTH DEARBORN, 38TH FL.
CHICAGO, IL 60604
(312) 353-4952

525 SOUTH EIGHTH STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62703
(217) 492-4062

701 NORTH COURT STREET
MARION, IL 62959
(618) 998-8812

www.senate.gov/~durbin

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Principi:

The Chicago Sun-Times today reported that disabled Illinois veterans, on average, receive far lower disability benefits than veterans from most other states. Since veterans benefits should be uniformly administered across the nation, this finding is deeply troubling to every Illinoisan, veteran and non-veteran.

We request that you meet with us and other members of the Illinois Congressional delegation early next week when Congress reconvenes to discuss this distressing situation. Following that meeting, we urge that you come to Chicago as soon as you possibly can to meet with veterans organizations and explain this disparity.

The Chicago Sun-Times cited VA data showing that Illinois veterans receive, on average, \$6,802 in benefits, 50th in the nation and 41 percent lower than veterans from Puerto Rico, who topped the list. Veterans in New Mexico, Maine, and Arkansas receive, on average, \$3,000 to \$4,000 more than Illinois veterans. Even veterans across the state line in Wisconsin receive nearly \$1,000 more per year, on average, than their Illinois counterparts. The article explains this disparity, in part, by indicating that the raters who determine benefit amounts for Illinois veterans "look at everything with jaundiced eyes."

Our veterans all served under the same red, white and blue standard and their disability claims should be measured by a single, fair standard as well. Unfortunately, it appears that the application of the VA's rules in its 58 regional offices is delivering unequal results for our disabled veterans in their time of need.

Clearly, this outcome cannot be allowed to continue, and we expect to work with you and others to make whatever changes are necessary to ensure that veterans in Illinois and other states can expect equal consideration.

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
December 3, 2004
Page Two

But the first step is to respond to the understandable outrage and distress of veterans in Illinois who feel they have been shortchanged by the country they so nobly served. Your appearance in Chicago to explain the matter to Illinois veterans is an essential first step toward addressing this unacceptable situation.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Lane Evans
Member of Congress



Luis Gutierrez
Member of Congress