

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3302

May 28, 2014

Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I recently traveled to Afghanistan to visit the brave men and women who are downrange, fighting for the freedom we are privileged to enjoy every day. While there, it became painfully clear to me that many of the soldiers who selflessly put their lives on the line each day will require the help of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) upon completing their service and transitioning into civilian life. I saw firsthand how these soldiers earn the benefits they are promised, as they willingly put their lives in harm's way while spending months—even years—away from their families. I write you today, Mr. Secretary, to inquire as to why our veterans are left to suffer under the irregular and inconsistent care at the VA. The sub-par care they are receiving has become the norm instead of the exception—and it is time for a change in the status-quo.

I find it troubling that the VA Inspector General has attributed many of the delays and inconsistencies to “widespread mismanagement,” yet many VA employees continue to receive bonuses in the tens of thousands of dollars for what appears to be substandard work. It is disheartening to learn that the VA provided its executives bonuses while overseeing an increase in backlogs of veterans claims and lengthier wait times for veterans as well. It is insulting to our veterans', and taxpayers alike, that failure is being rewarded while our veterans continue to go without the care and benefits they have earned.

The veterans served by the Fayetteville, N.C. and Durham, N.C. VA facilities in my district face the same grim fate as many others waiting for care. VA medical facilities should be a place where veterans can turn in a time of need, but instead many veterans seek their local VA as a last resort. The veterans whom my office assists in navigating these roadblocks to care often report feeling hopeless and forgotten. This is especially true as we lose approximately eighteen of these heroes a day from suicide. Even worse, Mr. Secretary, these veterans will not report mistreatment for fear of retaliation from the very people that are supposed to be helping them in their time of need.

Untimely, appointments and inaccuracies in scheduling have stripped veterans of the healthcare and benefits they deserve, resulting in death before some can even receive treatment. Mr. Secretary, it is clear now that pumping money into the VA's budget is not the answer—and

neither is mandatory overtime for VA employees. The problem has become obvious: top-down management of the VA needs to be overhauled. No veteran should have to suffer in the hands of the VA, and I eagerly await answers as to what you and the Department are doing to address this very serious situation. I also request an account of the actions currently being taken to remedy the severe problems occurring at both the Fayetteville and Durham facilities.

Sincerely,



Renee Ellmers
Member of Congress