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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

July 8, 2013

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

We all agree that veterans across Ohio and nationwide deserve a benefits system that meets their needs and a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that is efficient and direct. As you well know, Americans have learned a lot of unsettling things about the Executive Branch of our government in recent weeks. These recent findings represent a failure of federal bureaucracy and demonstrate the damaging effects of big government mismanagement. The American people, and veterans in particular, must be able to count on transparency from their government and we, as Members of Congress, will continue to fulfill our obligation to hold the VA and this administration accountable.

Nearly a year ago, in July 2012, the VA and the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) officially announced a transformation plan to eliminate the claims backlog in 2015 and process all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy. While your transformation plan includes lofty projections to eliminate the claims backlog, there are no short-term benchmarks to measure its success, and unfortunately, there is currently little evidence to suggest that your agency is trending to its 2015 plan goals. In fact, current data shows that rating claims processing times have increased for year to date – the Cleveland VA Regional Office (VARO) average stands at 456.6 days while the nationwide average stands at 365.5 days.¹ This data is cause for serious concern and raises the question of whether your 2015 goals are truly achievable.

The public demands a government that is direct and transparent, yet the VA has time and again ignored calls for increased transparency and agency accountability. The VA has yet to reveal its benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness of the 40 initiatives in the transformation plan; the VBA has chosen to implement extraneous claims processing measures to obscure the transformation plan's results; and VA executives have been awarded "performance" bonuses, including one executive who collected almost \$60,000 in bonuses while presiding over a near

¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration. Monday Morning Workload Reports. <http://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/mmwr/index.asp>, accessed July 8, 2013.

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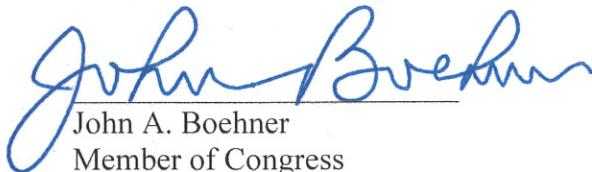
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seven-fold increase in the backlog. This is most certainly not the transparent and accountable government our veterans and the public demand.

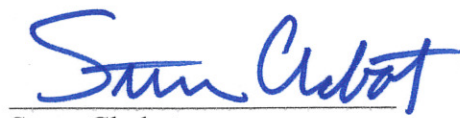
Mr. Secretary, you once said that the “VA has a responsibility to the American people, who are investing millions of dollars in technology projects, to deliver quality results that adhere to a budget and are delivered on time. They need to have confidence that the dollars they are spending are being effectively used to improve the lives of our Veterans.”² We respectfully request that you provide veterans and the American people with monthly accountability reports that specifically disclose how your agency’s 40 transformation initiatives are tracking to meet your 2015 goals. This information should be specific to each initiative and not simply incorporated into the figures displayed in Aspire Dashboard and Monday Morning Workload Reports.

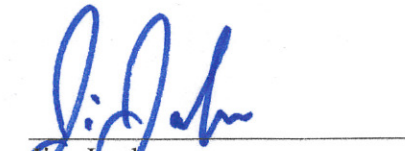
We request disclosure of this information beginning August 1, 2013. Our nation’s veterans are relying on you and the VA as they come home from the battlefield and collect the benefits they have so honorably earned. Thank you for your service and your prompt attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

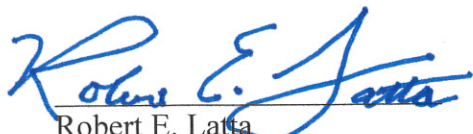

John A. Boehner
Member of Congress

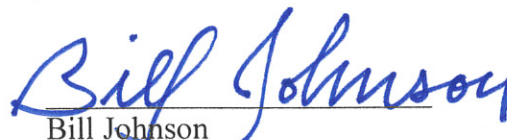

Rob Portman
United States Senator

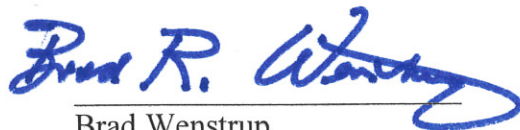

Steve Chabot
Member of Congress



Jim Jordan
Member of Congress

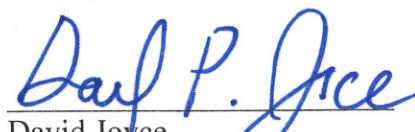
² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, Secretary Shinseki Announces Next Steps in Technology Advancements to Reduce Wasteful Spending and Increase Accountability. <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1734>, accessed June 13, 2013.

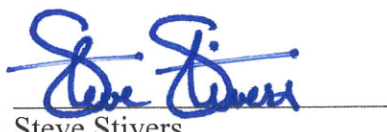

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