

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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NICK LAMPSON
22ND DISTRICT, TEXAS

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September 26, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-1400

The Honorable R. James Nicholson
Secretary, U.S. Department of
Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Gates and Secretary Nicholson,

Texas has provided more troops for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom than any other state in America. We have endured more casualties than any other state but one, and I am deeply concerned about soldiers' care when they come home. I was angered to hear that the neglect of our soldiers and veterans continues, months after change was promised by the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA).

According to testimony offered by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on September 26, 2007, soldiers continue to wait an average of 177 days for the Department to process an initial claim. For those who appeal, the average wait stretches to 657 days. This is simply unacceptable. Our soldiers, many of which are young and struggling with new physical and mental health disabilities, should never have to wait six months, let alone two years, to receive treatment and benefits.

Recent reports reveal that veterans have incurred insurmountable debt and in some cases are forced to live on the streets while they wait for their benefits claims to be processed. Poor coordination between agencies, a lack of caseworkers and resources, and lax preparation and the resulting affects are disgraceful. Forcing soldiers and their families into prolonged situations of suffering is reprehensible.

We first learned of these problems last February when appalling conditions were revealed at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. We also learned that growing numbers of Vietnam Veterans were applying for help after years of mistreatment and neglect of mental health issues. Since then, the VA and DoD have failed to take immediate action to improve health care and fast-track disability evaluations for our service members, past and present. Revelations such as these demand greater oversight and prompt implementation of new policies. We must not let another generation of veterans fall through the cracks, for their lives and well-being are at stake.

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WRITTEN BY REPUBLICAN BARR
CONGRESSMAN NICK LAMPSON

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Earlier this year, Congress appropriated additional funds to facilitate the need for new doctors, nurses, and caseworkers. We also created a suicide prevention hotline and a wounded soldier's hotline to provide our heroes a literal life-line to report injustices and insufficiencies in their medical care. The funding provided by Congress was explicitly given to fix the dismal conditions an increasing number of soldiers are facing when they come home. Despite public and Congressional pressure, the GAO testimony notes that shortfalls in staffing and poor planning continue. It is no wonder that anger and frustration persists among our troops and their families for the treatment they receive.

The treatment of our soldiers when they return home is a true measure of support and gratitude for their service. The lack of action and planning taken by the VA and DoD is shameful. I urge you to resolve these injustices immediately – our brave men and women must not suffer or be neglected any longer.

Sincerely,



Nick Lampson
MEMBER OF CONGRESS