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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel:

We are writing to highlight an issue of vital importance to our nation's veterans. As a veteran yourself, a former Deputy Administrator of the Veterans Administration, and an advocate for veterans during your tenure as a Senator, we are confident that you thoroughly understand and appreciate the challenges facing the veteran population today.

One of the largest challenges confronting the Department of Veterans Affairs is its continuing struggle to provide timely and accurate claims decisions. The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs recently held a hearing to examine VA's efforts to transform the compensation claims system. The relationship between VA and DoD was discussed numerous times during the hearing. These discussions emphasized the absolute need for continued collaboration, cooperation, and commitment between these two agencies. As VA continues to move forward with implementation of its plan to transform the compensation claims system, DoD's role becomes increasingly vital.

We appreciated hearing that DoD and VA have recently reached an agreement to speed the delivery of evidence necessary for the adjudication of compensation claims. Under this agreement, DoD will be responsible for gathering service treatment records, validating the completeness of the records, and providing the complete package of records to VA. Our understanding is that such packages are still transferred to VA in paper format, but that DoD has accelerated the development of its Healthcare Artifact and Image Management Solution to facilitate the electronic transfer of service treatment records by December 2013.

We request that you ensure DoD makes smart investments in the resources and manpower necessary to expedite the transition from paper to electronic records transfer. Ultimately, a common overarching information technology solution must be created to provide seamless electronic transmission of the information necessary to speed the processing of benefit decisions. We would also request that DoD work closely with VA to ensure that Guard and Reserve records are included in this process. It is imperative that DoD and VA work collaboratively to ensure a seamless transition process.

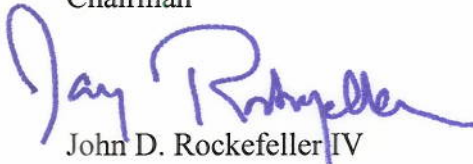
Moving forward, we ask that you work to strengthen DoD's existing partnership with VA as it continues to transform its compensation claims system into one fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We look

forward to working together to ensure that the brave men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend our country receive the benefits that they undoubtedly earned and deserve.


Sincerely,




Bernard Sanders  
Chairman



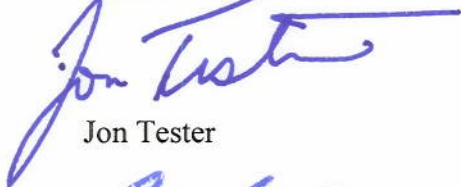
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Jerry Moran



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Dean Heller

cc: The Honorable Eric Shinseki