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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** [Neal A. Patel](mailto:neal_patel@heller.senate.gov)/[Michawn Rich](mailto:michawn_rich@heller.senate.gov) | | January 27, 2016 | 202-224-6244 |   **Heller Doubles Down on Need for VA Claims Backlog Statistics Accuracy**  **(Washington, DC)** – Recently, U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) sent the following letter to United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert McDonald to express concern regarding potential inaccurate VA disability claims statistics. As Co-Chair of the [VA Claims Backlog Working Group](http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=0fc103f4-e52c-4c2b-833b-f1eee7cace02), ensuring Nevada and our nation’s veterans receive their claims decisions in a timely manner has been a top priority for Heller.  Last week, Secretary McDonald [did not adequately answer](http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/videos?ID=3a94fae8-611c-4156-b282-64c635c0950d) Senator Heller’s questions at Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing. You can watch the video [HERE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iq56BLBcRiI). Senator Heller’s letter asks the VA Secretary to commit to working with the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) to resolve the disability claims statistics discrepancy.  A PDF copy of the letter is attached with this release.  **Full text of letter to Secretary Johnson:**  The Honorable Robert McDonald  Secretary of Veterans Affairs  U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  810 Vermont Avenue Northwest  Washington, DC 20420    Dear Secretary McDonald:    Following the January 21, 2016, hearing at the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I wanted to follow up on an issue that you and I discussed during this hearing—the accuracy of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims statistics.  As you well know, ensuring that VA disability claims are completed in both a timely and accurate manner is a top priority for me and for veterans in Nevada.    During this hearing, I raised a concern regarding the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) testifying that it “can’t trust” the VA’s backlog statistics.  Furthermore, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified the following in July 2014 in reference to VA backlog statistics:    “In several basic areas, they are not following general statistical practices.  That looseness in their methodology translates to numbers that aren’t accurate and aren’t very helpful in terms of looking at trends over time in terms of performance, accuracy rates, and/or comparing offices in terms of relative performance . . . That’s not good metrics.”    Your response to me indicated that these concerns may have come up in 2014, but that today you “believe the data is accurate.”  While I recognize there may have been opportunities to resolve these concerns from the OIG, its report on this topic released on September 30, 2015, stated the following:    “We initiated several reviews at multiple [VA regionaloffices] addressing allegations of mismanagement and data manipulation.  We are concerned these actions appear to be indicators of a systemic trend, motivated to enhance reported performance metrics at the [VA regional offices.]”    Given this conclusion in the OIG report, I believe it is time for you as the VA Secretary to come together with the Veterans Benefits Administration and the VA OIG to resolve these claims of inaccurate data so that Congress, the American public, and veterans can be assured that the VA and the VA’s watchdog are in agreeance on the accuracy of the claims backlog.  Until then, there will not be a full understanding of what VA has accomplished when these statistics are put into doubt by the OIG.  That is why I respectfully request you formally commit to resolve this issue with the OIG and address the following questions:     1. W‎hat changes have been made to ensure the statistics are accurate for both the VA and the OIG? 2. When will such changes go into effect and how will these changes be communicated to the VAROs? 3. How are these changes reflected in the Monday Morning Workload Report?     I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the care worthy of their service and sacrifice. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your reply by February 2, 2016.    Sincerely,  DEAN HELLER.  U.S. Senator    cc: Deputy Inspector General Linda A. Halliday  ###  [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_fb.png](http://www.facebook.com/pages/US-Senator-Dean-Heller/325751330177) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_tw.png](http://twitter.com/SenDeanHeller) [http://www.heller.senate.gov/public/vendor/_skins/heller/images/newsletter/icon_yt.png](http://www.youtube.com/user/SenDeanHeller) |