

**For Immediate Release:** Contact: Chandler Smith

April 18, 2013 202-224-6244

**Heller, Reid, Heck, Titus, Horsford**

**Seek to Reduce Nevada’s VA Claim Backlog**

**(Washington, D.C.) –** Today, U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV) and Harry Reid (D-NV) joined Representatives Joe Heck (NV-03), Dina Titus (NV-01), and Steven Horsford (NV-04) in sending a letter to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey and Reno VA Regional Office (VARO) Director Edward Russell, offering help in addressing Nevada’s backlog of VA claims.

“Unfortunately, the State of Nevada is home to more than 10,000 heroes stuck waiting for answers regarding their benefits claims. These selfless patriots know all too well the price that is paid for freedom, and the last thing they should be worried about is waiting for the benefits they earned in service to our nation. Addressing the claims backlog must be a top priority, and I am committed to doing what it takes to help the VA and the Reno VARO eliminate this problem,” said Senator **Dean Heller**.

“While I am pleased that Congress has provided increased benefits and disability compensation for our nation’s veterans, it is a shame that they have to endure extensive waiting times to receive the services they require,” said **Reid**.  “I am aware of the serious backlog in claims at the Reno VARO and I remain committed to working with the VA to get these issues sorted out so that our veterans can get the benefits and services they have earned and deserve.”

“The VA was unprepared for the volume of claims resulting from more Vietnam Vets receiving coverage for Agent Orange exposure and from the complexity of the claims arising from the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan,” Rep. **Heck** said. “However, after four years of commitments to decrease claim processing times, too many veterans are still waiting far too long for the benefits and services they earned. This situation must be resolved and it must be resolved now.”

“Our veterans have to wait far too long to receive the benefits they earned through their service to our country,” Congresswoman **Titus** said. “We have an obligation to resolve this issue and improve the claims processing at the Reno VA Regional Office (VARO) as soon as possible. As the Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, I have made this issue a top priority.  I look forward to working with the delegation to continue to address the needs of our veterans.”

“Our veterans put their lives on the line and risk everything to protect our country. We owe them a debt of gratitude that can never truly be repaid, but the least we can do is provide them the care they desperately need and deserve. Reducing the VA claims backlog is critical to ensuring Nevada veterans receive their due benefits and compensation, and I join my colleagues in the Nevada delegation in calling on Under Secretary Hickey and Director Russell to work with us to make the Reno VA Regional Office more responsive,” said Congressman **Steven Horsford**.

A PDF of the letter is attached with this release.

**Full text of the letter below**:

April 17, 2013

The Honorable Allison A. Hickey

Under Secretary for Benefits

Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20420

Mr. Edward Russell, Director

Department of Veterans Affairs

Reno Regional Office

5460 Reno Corporate Drive

Reno, NV 89511

Dear Under Secretary Hickey and Director Russell:

We write to you today regarding the high number of backlogged claims in the Reno VA Regional Office (VARO). We appreciate the opportunity to contact you about this important issue that is critical to Nevada’s veterans.

There are currently 10,000 pending claims and more than 8,000 backlogged claims at the Reno VARO still awaiting an answer. According to the Center for Investigative Reporting, 4,210 Nevada veterans have waited more than a year for an answer. On average, the wait time is 479 days, and the average wait time for veterans filling for their first time is 681 days. This is significantly longer than the national average and is unacceptable for veterans in Las Vegas, Reno, and across the State of Nevada who are relying on the Reno VARO to adjudicate these claims in a timely manner.

We recognize there are multiple factors contributing to the number of veterans’ claims entering the system, including the addition of presumptive diseases associated with Agent Orange and the drawdown of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, addressing the claims backlog must be a priority regardless of these factors.

We respectfully request that you provide us with your recommendations for what the Reno VARO needs from the Nevada Congressional delegation to assist in reducing this unacceptable backlog. It is our combined goal to see this backlog eradicated as quickly as possible so Nevada veterans can receive the compensation and benefits they have earned in service to our nation.

In the interest of ensuring America’s brave heroes are taken care of, we are committed to working with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Reno VARO as you undertake this endeavor. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to hearing from you on how to be helpful in addressing the Reno VARO’s claims backlog.

Sincerely,

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HARRY REID

U.S. Senator

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DEAN HELLER

U.S. Senator

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JOE HECK

U.S. Representative

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DINA TITUS

U.S. Representative

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STEVEN HORSFORD

U.S. Representative

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