United States Congress

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| **For Immediate Release**April 29, 2013 | **Contact:**April Mellody (Casey) 202- 228-6367                    Chandler Smith (Heller) 202-224-6244      |
| Casey, Heller Lead Bipartisan Letter Urging President Obama to Become Personally Involved in Effort to Reduce VA Claims Backlog   *Average Wait Time for Veterans Disability Claims Is Over 300 Days**67 Senators Call for ‘Direct Action’ from President* **Washington, DC**- Today, U.S. Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and Dean Heller (R-NV) announced that they have sent a letter to President Obama urging him to become personally involved and take direct action to reduce the current backlog of veterans’ disability claims. Currently, the average veterans disability claim takes over 300 days to be resolved. In their letter, which was joined by 65 other Senators, Casey and Heller cited long delays in cities across the country in making their case to the President for swift action to reduce the backlog. The Senators wrote, “After a decade of war, and despite the VA’s efforts to modernize, more than 600,000 veterans are still stuck in the VA’s disability claims backlog. While the average wait time for first time disability claims currently ranges between 316 and 327 days, veterans in certain parts of the country are waiting even longer….. Solving this problem is critical for veterans of all generations. We need direct and public involvement from you to establish a clear plan to end the backlog once and for all.” “The growing impatience over the VA disabilities backlog is one of the few genuine bi-partisan issues in Washington today.  IAVA thanks leaders in the Senate for their bi-partisan efforts to help end the backlog and ensure that veterans get the care they need. We appreciate Senators Casey and Heller for organizing this important letter with their colleagues, and we are honored that two veterans, Senators Lautenberg and McCain, joined this effort. Our veterans now need to hear from the President about how he plans to bring the number of veterans in the backlog to zero,” said Paul Rieckhoff, CEO and Founder of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. In addition to Senators Casey and Heller, the following Senators signed the letter:  Mark Warner, Kirsten Gillibrand, Angus King, Elizabeth Warren, Joe Donnelly, Jeff Flake, Rand Paul, James Risch, John McCain, Lindsey Graham, Pat Toomey, Roy Blunt, Tammy Baldwin, Saxby Chambliss, Michael Enzi, Jerry Moran, Jeff Sessions, Mitch McConnell, Mark Begich, Johnny Isakson, John Boozman, Jeff Merkley, Maria Cantwell, Dianne Feinstein, Marco Rubio, Chuck Grassley, Orrin Hatch, Pat Roberts, Frank Lautenberg, Debbie Stabenow, Tom Carper, David Vitter, Jeanne Shaheen, Mark Kirk, Robert Menendez, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jay Rockefeller, Claire McCaskill, John Cornyn, Ben Cardin, Chris Murphy, Mazie Hirono, Ted Cruz, Thad Cochran , Ron Wyden, Mike Crapo, Roger Wicker, Mark Pryor, John Thune, Kay Hagan, Susan Collins, Heidi Heitkamp, Tom Harkin, Brian Schatz, Bill Nelson, Dick Durbin, Lisa Murkowski, Jon Tester , Richard Blumenthal, Joe Manchin, Harry Reid, Tim Kaine, Rob Portman, Kelly Ayotte and Tim Scott. According to a recent [report](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/14/veterans-benefits_n_2875637.html) , the average wait time for first time disability claims currently ranges between 316 and 327 days. The full text of the Senators’ letter can be seen below. April 26, 2013The PresidentThe White House1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NWWashington, DC 20500 Dear Mr. President:   We are writing to request that you take direct action and involvement in ending the current Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims backlog.  After a decade of war, and despite the VA’s efforts to modernize, more than 600,000 veterans are still stuck in the VA’s disability claims backlog. While the average wait time for first time disability claims currently ranges between 316 and 327 days, veterans in certain parts of the country are waiting even longer – 681 days in Reno, 642 in New York, 625 in Pittsburgh, 619 in Los Angeles, 612 in Indianapolis, 586 in Houston, and 510 in Philadelphia. In the worst cases, veterans have waited and continue to wait 800 days, 900 days, and even more than 1000 days for a disability claims decision from the VA. In the last four years, the number of claims pending for over a year has grown by over 2000%, despite a 40% increase in the VA’s budget. As a reminder, during this same time period, Congress has given VA everything it has asked for in terms of more funding and more employees; however, this has not eliminated the backlog of claims. Solving this problem is critical for veterans of all generations. We need direct and public involvement from you to establish a clear plan to end the backlog once and for all. This country must be grateful for the safe homecoming of every single man and woman who has served in harm’s way.  Our joy at their return must be reflected in our commitment to helping all who have served.  We respectfully ask you and your administration to find a solution that ensures that no veterans are stuck in the VA backlog. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. Sincerely, ### |