

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:** Megan Taylor |
| June 28, 2017 | 202-224-6244 |

**Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Passes Bill to Reduce VA Appeals Backlog**

**Washington, D.C** – U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV), a senior member of the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, today voted to advance the Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act (S.1024), legislation overhauling the current appeals process at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Committee passed S.1024 in an effort to address the nearly half a million appeals nationwide that can take years before veterans receive a final decision. The bill will now head to the full U.S. Senate for consideration.

The Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, which Senator Heller is a cosponsor of, creates three different options for veterans who wish to appeal their case. A veteran would be able to seek a higher-level review by a regional office on the same evidence, file a supplemental claim with a regional office with the ability to submit additional evidence, or appeal directly to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals with the possibility of a hearing or the ability to submit additional evidence. This legislation will also institute safeguards to ensure the VA has a plan to address pending appeals, the authority to test facets of the new appeals system, and compare data between the new and old system to gauge its success in serving veterans and their families.

“As a senior member of the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee and Co-Chair of the Senate VA Backlog Working Group, I have been committed to expediting the VA’s disability claims process and eliminating the claims backlog,” **said Heller**. “Unfortunately, while many veterans now receive a faster claim decision, it isn’t always accurate and they are forced to wait years to get through a cumbersome VA appeals process. I was proud to support the Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, which would provide Nevada’s veterans with more options to appeal a case and put the VA on a path to a quicker, more efficient system that will ensure veterans are compensated for their injuries of war. I’ll continue to hold the VA’s feet to the fire when it comes to reducing the claims and appeals backlog and providing Nevada’s veterans quality and timely care.”

Heller is a senior member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee and uses this role to advocate on behalf of Nevada’s 300,000 veterans. As the Co-Chair of the bipartisan [Senate VA Backlog Working Group](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=2daa6da5-8c7a-447d-951a-c03e9f1f11e9), Heller has long advocated for solutions to expedite the processing of veterans’ disability claims and ultimately reduce the VA claims backlog, which still hovers around 90,000 claims. In the last Congress, Heller introduced the 21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act, legislation designed to address the current claims backlog by overhauling the claims process to withstand a surge in claims. That bill was [included in a larger veterans legislative package, which was signed into law](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=971372BC-A7E5-468A-9C64-1ACD72EAB363https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=971372BC-A7E5-468A-9C64-1ACD72EAB363).

###