

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2014

COMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION
BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I am writing to you regarding my continued, serious concerns for Nevada's Veterans due to the lack of accountability and transparency at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which has led to an unacceptable lapse in services, care, and benefits to our Veterans. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and as Co-Chair of the Senate VA Backlog Working Group, I appreciate the opportunity to contact you about this issue critical to Veterans across my state.

Serving Nevada's Veterans and ensuring they receive quality medical care at VA's facilities and timely delivery of benefits has always been a priority of mine. I have worked in a bipartisan manner to address these issues and have tried to work with the VA to improve its care and services so that our nation keeps the promises it has made to the brave men and women who have sacrificed on our behalf. However, Nevada continues to have the lowest-performing VA Regional Office in the nation. Furthermore, timeliness of appointments, availability of care, and treatment of Veterans at the Las Vegas VA Medical Center remain a concern of mine.

When I met with you in February, you promised that there would be changes in Nevada, and I was hopeful that this commitment would help fix the problems plaguing Veterans' benefits and care in my state. Today, changes have still not been made. I sent a letter to the VA, with my colleagues, regarding serious concerns with VA communication on a local level. There still has not been a resolution to this critical issue. In fact, despite repeated requests from my staff, your agency has yet to honor those requests to resolve the problem.

My concern is that this lapse in accountability on a local level is indicative of a systemic problem across the VA. If changes are not going to be made at the local level to address the problems plaguing the VA system in Nevada, then changes may need to be made at the top.

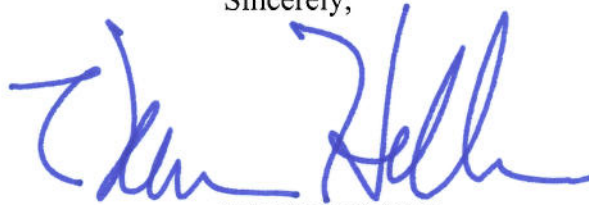
As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and as a U.S. Senator representing the State of Nevada, I believe immediate Congressional oversight of the VA is necessary to ensure that the problems impacting Veterans in Nevada are addressed immediately. That is why I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

1. What changes does the VA plan to make at the VA Regional Office in Reno to address the fact that Nevada Veterans continue to experience the longest wait in the nation for their disability claims to be approved and when will these changes go into effect?

2. When will the Reno VA Regional Office respond to my colleagues and my requests to conduct a meeting to resolve concerns with responsiveness to Congressional inquiries on behalf of Veterans?
3. What actions has the VA taken and plans to take to ensure that the Reno and Las Vegas VA hospitals and the Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) across the state are utilizing proper appointment wait-time and scheduling policies?
4. Given that VA appointment wait times impact the backlog of Veterans' disability claims, I respectfully request that the VA provide appropriate data regarding appointment wait times for Compensation and Pension (C&P) disability examinations at VA medical facilities in Nevada.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I respectfully request your input on the above questions no later than May 21, 2014.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Heller", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator