

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 20, 2013

The Honorable Allison A. Hickey
Under Secretary for Benefits
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Under Secretary Hickey:

We are writing to you regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) announcement that 97 percent of all claims over two years old have been eliminated from the backlog. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss this development with you.

It is encouraging to hear that the VA has expeditiously processed nearly all the claims for veterans that have been waiting on a decision for more than two years. Our veterans have waited too long for these decisions and we appreciate the focus you have placed on bringing down these backlog numbers. We trust that the VA is accurately reporting the number of claims being closed but ask that you verify a few points that we are concerned about by answering the following questions:

1. Of the claims cleared from the backlog, were any of these claims considered provisional—with provisional being defined as “any aspect of the claim still remaining open”?
2. Is there any way a claim, with issues still pending and in the ratings process, can be deemed by the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) to be closed solely for reporting purposes?
3. Given the strict deadline for completing all claims older than two years, did Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR's) have enough time to ensure the rating was the correct decision for the veteran? If so, what was the accuracy of the recently adjudicated claims?
4. VBA was able to adjudicate the two year old claims relatively quickly. Were any of these claims unnecessarily delayed during the claim development and ratings process? If so, what was the cause of this delay?

We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to working with you as Congress and the VA continue discussing how best to meet the needs of our Nation's veterans. We respectfully ask that you respond to this letter by July 1, 2013.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator



ROBERT P. CASEY JR.
U.S. Senator