

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 27, 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 following up with you today to once again request that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) address my ongoing concerns for the care and benefits provided to Nevada's Veterans and provide a detailed written response to my letter from May 8, 2014. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and as Co-Chair of the Senate VA Backlog Working Group, I believe it is my responsibility follow up with you about this issue critical to Veterans across my state in order to ensure that they are receiving the care they were promised.

Given the gravity of what has come to light about the VA and the potential impact it could have on Nevada's Veterans, I am extremely concerned by the VA's failure to respond to my letter asking for immediate answers for Nevada's Veterans. This is too timely of an issue to delay and warrants immediate attention; yet, to date, I have not received a response to my May 8th letter. As Nevada's U.S. Senator representing the nearly 300,000 Veterans living in my home state, I believe it is my role and responsibility to ensure America's brave heroes receive quality medical care at VA's facilities as well as timely delivery of disability benefits. That is why I will continue to seek answers regarding how the VA will hold its employees responsible and will ensure the care being provided to Nevada's Veterans is adequate.

When men and women across our nation committed to serving America and risking their lives to protect us, our country promised that, in return, we would care for these service members upon their return home. Given the issues that Nevada's Veterans have been facing, I do not believe that promise has been kept. Nevada still has the lowest-performing VA Regional Office in the nation for processing Veterans' disability claims. Nevada's Veterans have told me of their concerns with appointment wait times and care at Nevada's VA medical facilities. Even my staff has had its own issues with communication with local VA officials when trying to get answers for Nevada Veterans and their families. These are all concerns I have expressed to the VA in Committee hearings, in letters, in meetings, and in personal conversations; yet despite promises of change, I have not seen any results.

I believe there is a significant lapse in accountability on a local level, and it is time for immediate answers from the VA about how it plans to address this issue for Nevada's Veterans. That is why I again respectfully request answers to the following questions:

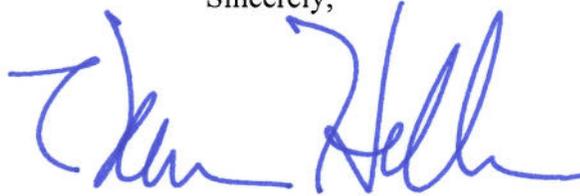
1. What changes does the VA plan to make at the VA Regional Office in Reno to address the fact that Nevada Veterans continue to experience the longest wait in the

nation for their disability claims to be approved and when will these changes go into effect?

2. When will the results of the VA's face-to-face audits be provided to me and my colleagues in Congress? If it is found that VA employees have engaged in misconduct at a Nevada facility, will the Secretary request that the IG investigate?
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 a written reply on the above follow-up questions no later than June 3, 2014. Should I not receive a response by this date, I request a written explanation as to why a response could not be provided in a timely manner.

Sincerely,



DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator