DEAN HELLER
NEVADA
(202) 224-6244

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 26, 2016

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

Following the January 21, 2016, hearing at the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I wanted to follow up on an issue that you and I discussed during this hearing—the accuracy of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims statistics. As you well know, ensuring that VA disability claims are completed in both a timely and accurate manner is a top priority for me and for veterans in Nevada.

During this hearing, I raised a concern regarding the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) testifying that it "can't trust" the VA's backlog statistics. Furthermore, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified the following in July 2014 in reference to VA backlog statistics:

> "In several basic areas, they are not following general statistical practices. That looseness in their methodology translates to numbers that aren't accurate and aren't very helpful in terms of looking at trends over time in terms of performance, accuracy rates, and/or comparing offices in terms of relative performance . . . That's not good metrics."

Your response to me indicated that these concerns may have come up in 2014, but that today you "believe the data is accurate." While I recognize there may have been opportunities to resolve these concerns from the OIG, its report on this topic released on September 30, 2015, stated the following:

> "We initiated several reviews at multiple [VA regional offices] addressing allegations of mismanagement and data manipulation. We are concerned these actions appear to be indicators of a systemic trend, motivated to enhance reported performance metrics at the [VA regional offices.]"

Given this conclusion in the OIG report, I believe it is time for you as the VA Secretary to come together with the Veterans Benefits Administration and the VA OIG to resolve these claims of inaccurate data so that Congress, the American public, and veterans can be assured that the VA and the VA's watchdog are in agreeance on the accuracy of the claims backlog. Until then, there will not be a full understanding of what VA has accomplished when these statistics are put into

doubt by the OIG. That is why I respectfully request you formally commit to resolve this issue with the OIG and address the following questions:

1. What changes have been made to ensure the statistics are accurate for both the VA and the OIG?

2. When will such changes go into effect and how will these changes be communicated to the VAROs?

3. How are these changes reflected in the Monday Morning Workload Report?

I look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that our veterans and their families receive the care worthy of their service and sacrifice. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your reply by February 2, 2016.

Sincerely,

DEAN HELLER.
U.S. Senator

cc: Deputy Inspector General Linda A. Halliday