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Congress of the United States
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September 21, 2012

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The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20420-0002

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

It is a matter of great concern to me that veterans in Alabama and across the country are facing extremely long backlogs for responses and resolutions to benefit claims and appeals filed with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). My office regularly receives reports from veterans who have experienced excessive delays and have been unable to obtain benefits or case reviews in a timely manner. To cite just one example, a veteran is awaiting review of an appeal certified on August 16, 2010. In recent testimony submitted to Congress, the VA stated that it had 870,000 pending claims cases as of mid-June 2012, two-thirds of which had been pending for more than 125 days. It is my understanding that the backlog for appeals in the State of Alabama is as high as 893 days.

Our veterans made a commitment to us, and we must keep our commitment to them. In my district and across the country, these delays are forcing veterans into credit card debt, student loans at higher interest rates, and even choosing between going to school or meeting their daily living expenses. The uncertainty of this situation has also affected colleges and universities, many of whom have tried to accommodate veterans by accepting them for classes without the customary advance payment. Please provide a report to my office on specific remedial steps that are being taken or can be taken to ensure that appeals and claims filed by our veterans are promptly reviewed and that they receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation in addressing this regrettable situation.

Sincerely,



Spencer Bachus
Member of Congress