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ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

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February 14, 2014

The Honorable Eric Shinseki
 Secretary, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs
 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I write to you regarding the ongoing efficacy of the Regional Office Action Review (ROAR) visits led by The American Legion. As you may know, ROAR visits to Regional Offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs have been conducted for over 15 years. These visits focus on both quality review oversight and evaluation of Regional Office work procedures.

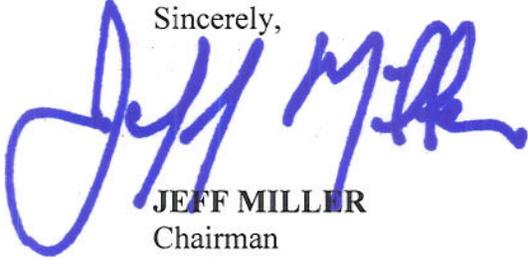
Recently, on December 4, 2013, the Legion's Deputy Director for Claims testified before the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. He stated that VA's accuracy statistics are not consistent with the Legion's review of recently adjudicated claims; in the past year, 55 percent of claims reviewed by the Legion were identified as having errors, particularly as regards the development of the claim. Subsequent to that hearing, it was brought to my attention that the Veterans Benefits Administration has newly obstructed the Legion's ROAR efforts. At a recent site visit to the Seattle Regional Office, it was alleged that Allison A. Hickey, Under Secretary for Benefits, limited the Legion's ability to fruitfully conduct its visit, converse with claims processing staff, and thoroughly review disability benefits claims in accordance with its long standing practice.

Consequently, effective immediately and until further notice, staff of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs will attend and report upon all ROAR visits of The American Legion. The recent actions of the Veterans Benefits Administration are perceived as deliberate and retaliatory, and I caution that any obstruction to external review of VBA's work product is contrary to both transparency and government accountability; it will not be tolerated under a pretense of workload management. Moreover, actions taken to frustrate the reviews of The American Legion are hostile to both the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the interests of our Nation's veterans.

The American Legion's efforts run parallel to those of the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is important to recognize that, in this period of Transformation, the Legion's commitment to quality outcome is a force multiplier to what should be VA's true goal, improving the Department's ability to serve and honor America's veterans.

I will continue to monitor this situation. In future ROAR visits, I request that The American Legion experience the level of cooperation that has historically existed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Miller". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name "Jeff" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Miller".

JEFF MILLER
Chairman

JM/lvr