

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 27, 2007

The Honorable R. James Nicholson
U.S Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

We are writing to inquire about the urgent staffing situation reported at the nation's Vet Centers. As you know, the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused increasing numbers of new veterans to enter the VA system, each deserving the highest possible standard of care that our nation has to offer. Since 2004, the number of returning Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans visiting VA walk-in clinics has more than doubled, yet staffing at VA centers has only increased by 10%.

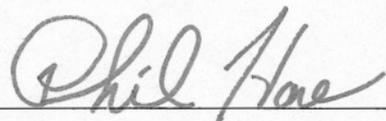
We believe that this slight increase is inadequate and irresponsible given the ever-increasing demand for VA healthcare and counseling services. These staffing shortages unacceptably jeopardize the mental and physical health of both returning troops and aging veterans at a time when more than one in four of our troops have acknowledged mental health issues.

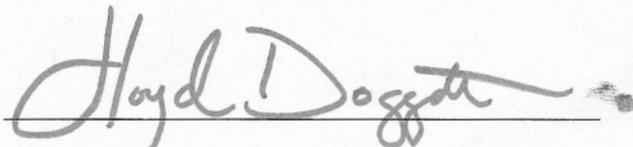
Not only do these shortages place the mental health and well-being of veterans at risk, but they place a significant strain on an already overworked staff. This has resulted in the institution of waiting lists, further increasing the backlog at the VA. Moreover, overburdened staff have reported using group therapy sessions, rather than individual counseling to handle the large number of patients.

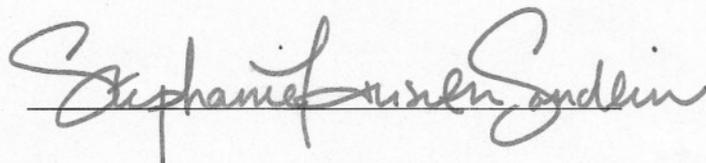
We urge you to address these issues immediately. In addition, we would like to know, (1) what actions are planned to meet the staffing crisis at the Vet Centers; and (2) how much funding or other federal resources would be required to fully staff Vet Centers over the next five years.

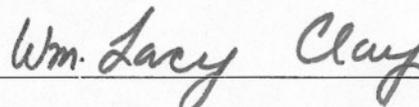
Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,









Jim McLean

Shelley Berney

Jan Schatz

Frank Ransom

Tom All

Sam Tan

Mazie K. Hirono

Jim Mathen

Neil Abernombie

Jim M

John Lewis

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