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ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

May 16, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki;

According to whistleblowers within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Southwest Healthcare Network facility (VISN 18) in Phoenix, Arizona, VA officials listed 1,400 sick veterans on "secret waiting lists" that would conceal their lengthy wait times from official statistics. In at least 40 cases, veterans allegedly lost their lives as a consequence of this wait and similar allegations have been made against VA facilities throughout the country. If the allegations are accurate, it would be an outrage that those who fought for our country are now subject to these deceitful tactics that prevents them from accessing timely healthcare, especially when their lives are at risk. Any "secret waiting lists" would be an affront to our men and women who so honorably served our country.

Similarly, veterans from my district in New Mexico have informed me they have been unable to gain access to healthcare because of inefficient practices and unresponsiveness from the VA, which has sometimes contributed to worsening health outcomes. My constituents have expressed their concern that even with a scheduled appointment with the VA, they have had to wait an excessive amount of time to see a medical professional. These complaints give me great concern about the overall process that veterans have to go through just to see receive the care they need.

On May 8th, Senator Tom Udall requested an expansion of the current investigation to include the operations of all veterans' medical centers within the VA Southwest Healthcare Network (VISN 18) by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. As this investigation by the Office of Inspector General continues throughout the country, I request that the VA regularly provide my office with updates on its progress, conclusions, and proposals to correct this situation within the New Mexico VA Healthcare System. This should also include any updates regarding tribal veteran care under the Memorandum of Understanding between Indian Health Services and the Veterans Administration.

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Should practices similar to those which allegedly occurred in Phoenix also be taking place within New Mexico, it is vital that they be addressed immediately to ensure that our veterans are receiving the care they deserve. For all of the aforementioned reasons, I again ask that you keep me apprised of all findings and developments within VISN 18 and the New Mexico VA Healthcare System as a result of your investigation. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Ray Luján". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail that curves to the right.

Ben Ray Luján  
Member of Congress