



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BAUCUS, HATCH CALL ON SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION TO EXPEDITE ASSISTANCE TO VETERANS

New GAO Report Shows SSA Communication Delays Add to VA Disability Claims Backlog, Leaving Veterans Waiting Months for Benefits

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Ranking Member Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) today called on the Social Security Administration (SSA) to work with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reduce the dramatic backlog in veterans' disability claims. The senators wrote a letter to SSA in response to [a new Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) report](#), which found SSA's delays are major contributors to the backlog.

"Veterans — especially those injured in service to our country — should never have to wait for the benefits they've earned," Senator Baucus said. **"Everyone understands the Social Security Administration's resources are tight, but there is absolutely no excuse for dropping the ball on veterans' needs. This issue needs to be addressed, and it needs to be addressed now. The Social Security Administration needs to come up with a meaningful plan to work more efficiently with the VA and fix this problem."**

"It is unacceptable that America's veterans — the men and women who've sacrificed so much for our nation — can't return home and access the benefits they have earned. What the GAO found is extremely troubling and the Social Security Administration must take immediate action to clear out this backlog and get these benefits to the veterans as quickly as possible. Our heroes deserve no less," Senator Hatch said.

In their letter, the senators noted that VA has consistent problems getting the medical records it needs from SSA. In one instance, regional VA officials commented that SSA takes more than a year to respond to requests. The senators asked SSA to provide information on any changes it is currently making or plans to make in the future to resolve their delays.

The full GAO report is available [here](#). The text of the senators' letter is below:

January 29, 2013

The Honorable Michael J. Astrue
Social Security Commissioner
Social Security Administration
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235-6401

Dear Commissioner Astrue,

Like all Americans, we want benefits for our veterans to be accessible and provided in a prompt manner. As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance, we want all agencies under the Finance Committee's jurisdiction to be working together with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) towards that goal. We are disappointed by a recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) which identified that a major delay in processing veterans' disability claims has been a lack of timely response for medical records from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

The details in the GAO report about SSA's lack of cooperation with VA are troubling. Though SSA has committed to sharing relevant medical records with the VA, VA staff reports difficulty obtaining SSA medical records in a timely fashion. VA staff rarely have a contact person at SSA who can assist in providing information on the status of VA requests. In one regional office, officials with VA commented that SSA takes more than a year to respond to requests for medical records. This situation is unacceptable and SSA must do better.

We understand that SSA has begun making changes that will improve the problems detailed in the GAO report. Please send us a detailed response that addresses each finding by GAO and provides us with specific steps SSA is taking to better meet the needs of VA and our veterans, and whether or not those changes have been implemented. If a proposed change has not been implemented, please provide details on why and specific details on the deadline for implementation.

Thank you in advance for your prompt response. We look forward to hearing from you by no later than February 19, 2013.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus
Chairman

Orrin G. Hatch
Ranking Member

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