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May 5, 2014

The Honorable Eric Shinseki  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I write regarding statements made by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary of Health Dr. Robert Petzel during his testimony before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on April 30, 2014 concerning the allegations of mismanagement and neglect at the Phoenix VA Health Care System (PVAHCS). In addition, I request clarification concerning the investigation(s) being conducted.

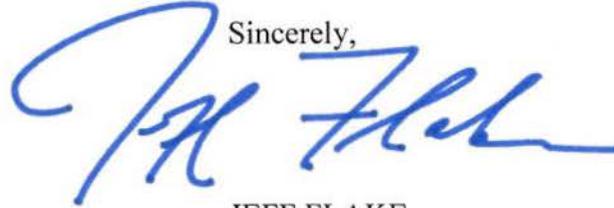
In his testimony, Under Secretary Petzel noted the seriousness of the recent allegations and existence of an independent investigation being carried out by the VA's Office of Inspector General. He also indicated that a team from the Veterans Health Administration has conducted an early review of appointment and scheduling processes at PVAHCS. Troublingly, despite cautioning that there be no "rush to judgment," he stated that this review found "no evidence of a secret list" and "no patients who have died because they have been on a waitlist." At a time when the VA Inspector General has yet to finish its investigation, I believe his comments were premature and unfortunate. I urge VA officials to refrain from making statements that may be construed as prejudicial to existing investigations, including conflating purported findings from a preliminary review by a VA administrative team with those of ongoing independent investigations.

As you know, Senator McCain and I have called on both the VA and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to investigate this very serious matter in a thorough and expedient manner. On April 28, 2014, President Obama announced that he had instructed you to investigate the allegations. This issue demands a conscientious and detailed inquiry and it would appear prudent to reduce bureaucratic overlap in order to arrive at an objective analysis as soon as possible. To that end, I seek clarification on the existing investigations:

- (1) Is your office currently carrying out an investigation?
- (2) If so, is your effort separate from the VA Inspector General's on-going independent investigation?
- (3) What connection does the preliminary review have to either of these investigations and, beyond Under Secretary Petzel's comments, have any of the findings been made public?

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you to ensure that our nation's veterans receive quality care in a timely fashion, and to reviewing the findings of the VA Inspector General's investigation in the days and weeks ahead. As always, I ask that this request be handled in strict accordance with agency rules, regulations, and guidelines.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J. Flake", written in a cursive style.

JEFF FLAKE  
United States Senator