

JOE DONNELLY
2ND DISTRICT, INDIANA

COMMITTEES:
FINANCIAL SERVICES
AGRICULTURE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

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

1218 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3915
FAX: (202) 225-6798
DISTRICT OFFICES:
207 WEST COLFAX
SOUTH BEND, IN 46601
(574) 288-2780
FAX: (574) 288-2825
LAPORTE COUNTY COMPLEX
809 STATE STREET, ROOM 501B
LAPORTE, IN 46350
(219) 326-6808 EXT. 414
FAX: (574) 288-2825
300 EAST BROADWAY, SUITE #102
LOGANSPORT, IN 46847
(574) 753-2671
FAX: (574) 753-7615

April 22, 2008

The Honorable John J. Hall
Chairman
Subcommittee on Disability
Assistance and Memorial Affairs
337 Cannon HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doug Lamborn
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Disability
Assistance and Memorial Affairs
333 Cannon HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hall and Ranking Member Lamborn,

I commend your efforts to address the VA's disability benefits system and your continued commitment to reforming a system that unfortunately is failing to provide America's veterans the best possible service. We must put a better process in place to handle these claims more efficiently for veterans of all conflicts.

The current system is unnecessarily complicated and straining under the weight of an aging veterans population and hundreds of thousands of new combat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. As you are aware, currently there are over 650,000 veteran disability claims pending, and this number has grown by over 400,000 since 2001. The average time it takes for veterans to receive an initial decision on their claims is nearly six months, and longer if they appeal. This is clearly unacceptable, and on behalf of our brave men and women who have served in uniform, we must do better.

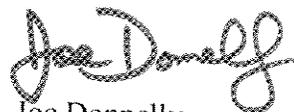
I have long advocated for substantive reforms to the claims process. I praise you for addressing this issue head-on, and support your efforts to craft legislation to modernize and reform the system. As you know, on November 15, 2007 I introduced H.R. 4219, *The Immediate Benefits for Wounded Warriors Act of 2007*, which aims to assign a temporary disability rating to combat-disabled veterans upon their separation from the Armed Forces, or in the case of an eligible member who has received a medical diagnosis of post traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, upon receipt of such diagnosis. Under my bill, this temporary rating would be provided until a permanent rating can be assigned, something that can currently take months to occur.

Americans are angry to hear that recent combat veterans who are seriously disabled must wait to receive disability benefits for an injury whose combat connectedness and severity are not in question. While the Veteran Benefits Administration currently has the authority to assign

temporary ratings, I am concerned that this authority is not presently exercised as often as it should be. I therefore respectfully urge you to include language in upcoming legislation that provides temporary or partial ratings to seriously-injured combat-disabled veterans so that they can receive disability benefits as soon as possible.

I look forward to working with you and members of our full committee to improve the claims process. America's veterans have fought and sacrificed for our nation, and we likewise owe them our greatest effort to enable them to receive their disability benefits in a timely fashion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Donnelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

Joe Donnelly
Member of Congress