

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 17, 2014

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-221, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
S-230, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Majority Whip  
United States Senate  
S-321, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Cornyn  
Minority Whip  
United States Senate  
S-208, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid, Senator McConnell, Senator Durbin and Senator Cornyn:

In the wake of the reported misconduct within Veteran Affairs (VA) medical facilities across the country, it is evident that the health care system still struggles to adequately serve the rapidly growing number of veteran enrollees without appropriate leadership. Although we commend our colleagues for their bipartisan commitment to care for our veterans, to assure accountability, and for passing a marginal funding increase to the VA budget, it is a moral obligation of this Congress to put in place qualified leadership to effectively guide the Department and prevent such misconduct. This is why we are writing to urge you to expedite the confirmation of Commissioner Linda Schwartz's nomination for the Assistant Secretary of Veteran Affairs for Policy and Planning.

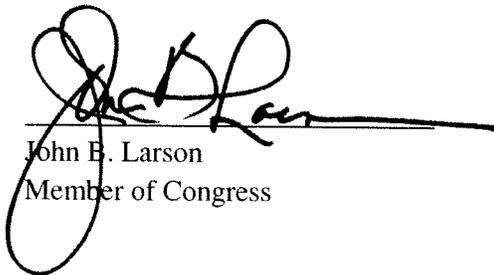
Over the past few years, VA has made progress in improving quality and expanding access to care as well as diversifying its range of services, including mental health, housing, job training, etc. As a result, 8.92 million enrolled veterans today receive access to superior resources and some of the best treatments available in the market. Therefore, it is no surprise that our veterans and their families rated VA services, in the American Customer Satisfaction Index, among the highest in the nation. Unfortunately, the VA System still struggles to overcome a number of longstanding challenges. Staffing shortages, shifting demand for services, and lack of availability of resources around the country still contribute to the chronic backlog.

As you know, Commissioner Schwartz is an extraordinary nominee who has already received bipartisan support in the Committee on Veteran Affairs and is only awaiting a vote on the Senate floor to complete the confirmation process. She has years of experience working within the Armed Services, both

on Active Duty and as a Reservist, and after her retirement from the United States Air Force, she continued to successfully advocate on behalf of veterans' rights. Her tireless efforts were recognized by not only veterans, but also leaders on both sides of the aisle as she was appointed Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Veteran Affairs by Republican and Democratic Governors. Over more than a decade of service as the Commissioner, she fought to modernize VA resources leading a multi-year effort to expand the state's veteran home in Rocky Hill to help ensure seamless accessibility to services. She also organized "Stand Down" events to expand access to critical services to veterans in need and reduce homelessness in the state. Commissioner Schwartz has also served as the president of the National Association of the State Directors of Veterans Affairs and on the boards of state and national nursing veterans' associations. She is an active member of the Governor Malloy's Veterans Cabinet as well as the First Congressional District Military and Veterans Advisory Council; and, she serves as an Associate Clinical professor at Yale University where she received an MSN and a Dr.P.H. Commissioner Schwartz's knowledge and experience working in veterans services are indispensable and exactly what is needed to help the VA make the most of its resources and prevent further misconduct.

Many of our colleagues in the House and Senate have voiced the need for Leadership change at the VA. It is important that we empower the Department with superb leaders who are known to proactively find solutions to problems. We urge you as Leaders of the Senate to come together and swiftly confirm the nomination of Commissioner Schwartz for the Assistant Secretary for the Policy and Planning of the Department of Veterans Affairs because our veterans desperately need her leadership.

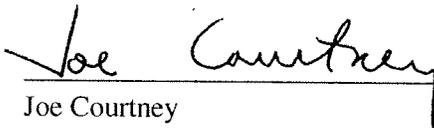
Sincerely,



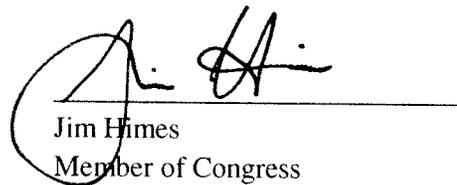
John B. Larson  
Member of Congress



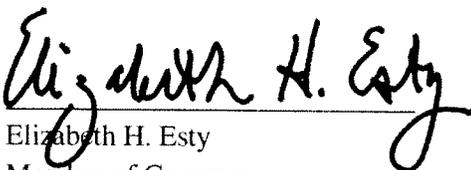
Rosa L. DeLauro  
Member of Congress



Joe Courtney  
Member of Congress



Jim Himes  
Member of Congress



Elizabeth H. Esty  
Member of Congress