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May 22, 2013

Hon. Eric Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I write today to express my outrage with an unacceptable and troubling pattern of incompetence and preventable bureaucratic inefficiency at the VA Western New York Healthcare System.

A series of developments have compounded to form a pattern of neglect at the Buffalo VA. From the improper use of insulin pens, to the mismanagement of Medical Records, to the decisions made surrounding the Golden Age Games, our veterans have been let down. They put their lives on the line to defend the United States and a good and grateful nation owes them far better than this.

Earlier this year, the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) investigated whistleblower information about poor record keeping and serious mishandling of medical records at both the Buffalo and Batavia VA sites finding that for at least eight years medical files, were randomly thrown in boxes and not maintained in accordance with requirements for records management, Social Security numbers were sometimes not properly attributed to the correct veteran name or mislabeled entirely, mold infested files were not handled properly to prevent further contamination and to ensure their restoration, and on several instances when veteran records were requested, rather than searching for information, staff deemed the documents to be "unavailable."

This month, a VA Office of Inspector General's report disclosed that twenty veterans treated at the Buffalo VA tested positive for hepatitis in the wake of revelations that nurses and medical personnel improperly reused insulin pens on multiple patients.

In March, the VA abruptly and arbitrarily announced plans to "postpone" the Golden Age Games in Buffalo. This news prompted an outcry from veterans, local organizers and Western New York businesses, who were able to reverse this potentially economically disastrous decision.

These situations and the pattern of behavior exhibited by the VA both erode my community's confidence in the Buffalo VA and raise serious concerns about larger issues present at the facility. Given these recent developments I am requesting a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss a plan to address this troubling situation at the VA Western New York Healthcare System.

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As we approach Memorial Day I know you share my support for restoring trust in, and renewing our country's historic covenant with its Veterans. I appreciate your attention to this issue and I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress