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COMMITTEE  
ON  
WAYS AND MEANS

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4208  
May 24, 2006

The Honorable Jim Nicholson  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

The recent and troubling news pertaining to the theft of personal information of over 26 million veterans was made more disconcerting by an article in today's *New York Times*. According to the story, your Department waited nearly two weeks to report the theft to law enforcement agencies, conceivably jeopardizing efforts to locate the stolen data. Our veterans, who have proudly worn the uniform, deserve to know how this violation occurred and why its notification was delayed.

Upon learning of the theft, the Department's immediate concern should have been how best to ensure the protection of our veterans from the ever-growing problem of identity theft. Presumably, an essential element of that effort would be the quick recovery of the stolen data. It is difficult to understand why the Department waited two weeks to notify the very agencies that are equipped to locate the stolen items.

I can assure you that Members of Congress are determined to prevent this unfortunate situation from repeating itself, and I plan on thoroughly addressing the issue with my colleagues in the coming weeks. But to approach the problem most effectively, Congress needs answers from you explaining why this incident was handled so poorly. Specifically, when was the Department notified of the theft and what discussions took place that apparently led to the decision against notifying law enforcement? Who is responsible for the decision to delay notifying law enforcement and more importantly, what was the rationale for such a decision?

Our nation has a proud military tradition rooted in the courage of the individual soldier, sailor and marine; the Department of Veterans Affairs embodies that spirit. I sincerely believe the Department's many employees and managers have only the best intentions and would never purposefully betray the trust of America's veterans. My fear is that the lax protection of personal information and the ensuing reaction by the Department to keep law enforcement in the dark will damage the credibility of your agency and betray the trust our American heroes place in their country to protect them as they fought to protect it.

I look forward to a timely response to my inquiry and remain hopeful the Department of Veterans Affairs can regain the confidence of America's veterans.

Sincerely,

John Tanner, M.C.

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