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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0105**

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Secretary Denis R. McDonough  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20571

Secretary McDonough,

I write to express my concerns regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS). As the elected representative for Alabama's Fifth Congressional District, I am committed to ensuring our veterans receive the benefits and services they have rightfully earned.

Over the past eighteen months, my office has received countless complaints about the BTSSS and requests for assistance to navigate the VA's reimbursement bureaucracy. These concerns include technical glitches and usability issues, processing delays, and the discouragement of paper claims, among other things.

While I understand the BTSSS' shortfalls are felt by veterans and their caregivers across the nation, I want to provide you with a picture of the constituency I proudly represent. AL-05 is home to Redstone Arsenal - a Federal Center of Excellence, hosts the second largest research park in the country, and has been rated one of the top communities to raise a family in and retire to for several years running. All said, almost 9.8% of the total AL-05 population have veteran status<sup>1</sup>. This is a higher rate than the state of Alabama at large and other Congressional districts across the nation, and I expect it to only grow in the coming years.

The deficits of BTSSS are further amplified by the fact that veterans in North Alabama must rely on it so frequently. While North Alabama has four VA clinics and several quality hospital systems and medical providers, the closest VA hospital is in Birmingham, AL, a three-to-six-hour roundtrip drive for the almost 57,200 veterans I represent.

In addition to discussions with constituents, I have reviewed the May 2024 GAO report titled "Additional Assessments of Mileage Reimbursement Data and Veterans' Travel Costs Needed"<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2022). American Community Survey 1-year estimates. Retrieved from Census Reporter Profile page for Congressional District 5, AL

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office (2024). "VA Health Care: Additional Assessments of Mileage Reimbursement Data and Veterans' Travel Costs Needed." VA Health Care: Additional Assessments of Mileage Reimbursement Data and Veterans' Travel Costs Needed | 28 May 2024

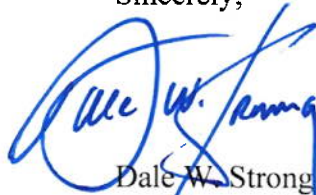
This report highlights that the Veterans' Health Agency is not accurately tracking the total cost of veterans' travel to VA appointments, which could assist with further program evaluation and help inform future VA decisions regarding resource reallocation and expanding options for community care, which in turn would help alleviate the need to use BTSSS so frequently.

I look forward to your prompt response to the following questions:

1. Does the VA plan to implement the four recommendations made in the May 2024 GAO report (GAO-24-106816)?
2. How does the VA plan to address system bugs and processing delays within the BTSSS to ensure that all veterans, regardless of their preferred submission method, receive timely reimbursements?
3. What plans exist to expand resources and options for care available to veterans in Alabama's Fifth Congressional District?

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your prompt response. Our veterans deserve a system that works efficiently and reliably, and I am eager to work with your office to achieve this goal.

Sincerely,



Dale W. Strong  
Member of Congress