

If VA allegations are true, heads have to roll

Written by Vonnie Hampel
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“This past weekend we celebrated Memorial Day where we take time to remember the men and women who gave their lives defending our nation and protecting the freedoms that we all deeply cherish. As we remember our fallen service members, we must continue to fight for the men and women who are currently serving our nation, as well as redouble our efforts to provide the best care possible to those who volunteered to serve and defend our nation when they return home.

“As a parent of military children the recent events at various VA health centers across the nation have been deeply disturbing to me. I believe that the VA must do everything in their power to rectify this situation and I will work to ensure they have the resources they need to prevent anything further from harming our veterans. But let me be clear, after the investigation has been concluded, if there is any evidence of wrongdoing, heads need to roll and people at the top must be held accountable.” – Congressman Dave Loebsack

Loebsack's Work on Behalf of Veterans

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee, Dave has worked to improve care and benefits for our service members and veterans, including expanding Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits for the National Guard; expanding access to mental health care; helping our veterans find civilian jobs; and opening new Community Based Outpatient Clinics to improve access to VA services for Iowa veterans. He also [co-introduced bipartisan legislation](#) to eliminate the waiting period for Social Security Disability Insurance benefits for service members wounded in combat.

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Congressmen: 'Heads have to roll' if VA charges proven (Des Moines Register- May 23)

Tony Leys

Two Iowa congressmen expressed confidence in the state's two VA hospitals Friday, but said they're concerned about reports that veterans are still waiting weeks or months for appointments.

"When you talk to a lot of veterans, you find that while ... initially getting in the system can be difficult and delayed, once they get into the system, they are very, very pleased," said Rep. Tom Latham, a Republican.

Latham and a Democratic colleague, Rep. Dave Loebsack, toured the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital on Des Moines' north side.

Both congressmen expressed anger about national reports that officials at some VA hospitals falsified reports to camouflage how long veterans were waiting to obtain medical appointments. In the most prominent example, about 40 patients reportedly died while waiting to get into the Phoenix VA hospital, where staff members allegedly faked documents to hide the problem.

"It's an absolute outrage," Latham said of the allegations. "Somebody should go to jail, as far as I'm concerned, if that's the case."

Loebsack agreed. "If these allegations prove to be correct ... heads have to roll, there's no doubt about it," he said.

However, neither congressman favors immediate dismissal of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki,

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which some critics have demanded.

President Barack Obama defended Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki Wednesday and said if there has been misconduct at the VA, it will be punished. Obama spoke after an Oval Office meeting with Shinseki and top aide Rob Nabors. (May 21) AP

"I don't know if that's going to change anything," Latham said. "If you want to have some kind of a trophy, I guess that sounds good, but I don't think it changes anything internally."

The congressmen noted that waiting lists have dogged the VA for years, despite Congress' willingness to pump billions of extra dollars into the system. "This is not a surprise, this is not a new story," Latham said. "I think the idea of secret waiting lists is new to the whole debate, but to me it's just a failure of the system."

Shinseki has ordered a review of all VA hospitals. VA officials have said 26 hospitals are being subject to especially intense investigations. They haven't identified most of the 26, although Latham told reporters that neither of the Iowa VA hospitals is among them.

Latham noted that he has sponsored legislation that would grant insurance cards to veterans, which they could use for medical care at hometown hospitals instead of at VA facilities. He said he believes such an approach, which would be voluntary, would make it easier for many veterans to gain care. But he noted that some national veterans groups have resisted the idea out of fear that it would weaken the VA.

Loebsack said he would be open to such a plan if it would help veterans.

Loebsack's district includes the Iowa City VA, which he said he has visited repeatedly. He said he asked to tour the Des Moines hospital with Latham so they could show bipartisan concerns about the situation. "I think if there's any silver lining to this, it is that we're refocusing attention on our veterans and what our veterans have done for us," he said.

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