Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2015

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
United States Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We are concerned about potential impacts on Minnesota and Wisconsin veterans from the Consolidated Patient Account Center team's review of inpatient co-pay charges for years 2011 to 2015. Recently, we were notified the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) discovered unbilled co-pay amounts for inpatient care provided to veterans over a five-year period at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Most concerning, veterans will be immediately assessed co-pays ranging from $1,000 to $3,000 because the VA erred in not charging veterans at the time of care. These charges, in the thousands of dollars, will unexpectedly appear on the veteran's upcoming monthly statement.

This VA review is likely to cause confusion, frustration, and stress for many veterans in Minnesota and Wisconsin who sought care at the VA. Many of our veterans live on fixed incomes or may not have the resources immediately available to cover the unexpected costs caused by the VA's erroneous billing procedures. The VA must ensure any adverse impacts are mitigated to the fullest extent possible.

We ask that the VA delay action in notifying veterans and pursuing collection of the unbilled co-pay amounts until the following questions have been addressed:

1. Why did the VA's Consolidated Patient Account Center team initiate this review of billing procedures and inpatient co-pay charges for the years 2011 to 2015?

2. What authority, under law, does the VA rely on to require veterans to pay for unbilled services years after receiving care that was not billed at the time of their initial care?

3. Is the VA conducting a similar nationwide review of inpatient co-pay charges?

4. Is the VA conducting a similar review of outpatient co-pay charges?

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5. How many veterans in Minnesota and Wisconsin will be billed for VA services due to the erroneous payment collection procedures at the VA for the years 2011 to 2015? How many veterans nationally are impacted?

6. Will the VA provide a grace period to alleviate the immediate impact on veterans or provide veterans the opportunity to appeal the decision to charge for services the VA failed to bill at the time of care?

7. What is the waiver process for veterans not required to pay the co-pay and what documentation is required by the veteran to receive a waiver of payment? What are the specific criteria needed to qualify for a waiver?

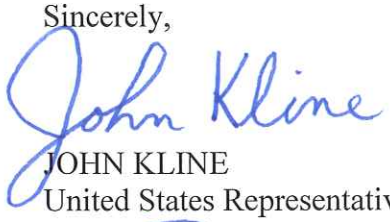
8. What is the VA's estimate of the total amount of valid co-pays unbilled over the 2011 to 2015 timeframe and what does the VA intend to do with the money collected?

9. What additional infrastructure does the VA intend to put in place to serve veterans during this process, to include: additional documentation to support the unbilled co-pays, extra in-person customer service desk hours to discuss billing questions with veterans, and extended Health Resource Center hotline hours for veterans looking to resolve co-pay issues?

The care of our veterans is a top priority. Our veterans sought care at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in good faith and should not be suddenly saddled with thousands of dollars in bills years later due to the VA's inability to properly track, record, and bill for services. Each year, Congress appropriates billions to the VA for administering medical care and benefits earned by our veterans through their service to our nation. The VA must investigate how these charges went unbilled and immediately correct any systemic issues.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to address this issue. Should you have any questions, your staff can contact Ryan Silverberg in Congressman John Kline's office at (202) 225-2271 or ryan.silverberg@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



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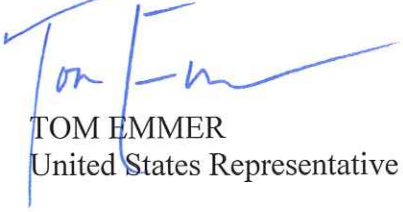

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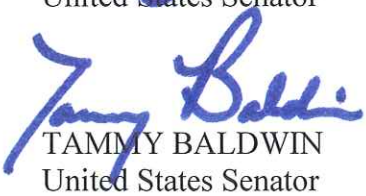

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