



Minnesota Congressional
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News Release

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Sen. Franken, Rep. Walz Introduce Bipartisan Legislation To Tackle Veterans Benefits Backlog

WASHINGTON, D.C. [05/16/13] – Today, U.S. Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) and Rep. Tim Walz (D-Minn.) announced the introduction of the *Quicker Benefits Delivery Act*, a bipartisan, bicameral bill aimed at tackling the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefit-claims backlog.

“We have a responsibility and obligation to take care of the men and women who have courageously served our nation,” said Sen. Franken. **“Right now veterans are waiting too long to start receiving the benefits they've earned from the VA. That's why I've joined my colleague to introduce bipartisan legislation to get benefits into the hands of veterans and their families as quickly as possible and help to reduce the claims backlog at the VA.”**

“After these brave men and women put their life on the line for us, the least we can do is ensure they are getting the benefits they have earned in a timely manner,” said Rep. Walz. **“I recognize this problem was not created, nor will it be solved, overnight, but we can and must do better. Our bipartisan legislation will enhance the VA's current efforts to break the backlog by helping them become more efficient, allowing them to hand down quicker, more accurate decisions to help end the backlog and get veterans the benefits they have earned.”**

As identified by the VA, for a veteran to qualify as in the backlog, they must be waiting 125 days or more for the VA to process their claim. Currently, nearly 600,000 veterans are in the VA benefits backlog. According to the Center for Investigative Reporting, the average wait time for veterans filing a claim for the first time at the St. Paul, Minnesota regional office is 180 days.

The Franken-Walz bill was written after engaging veterans and groups representing them at the local, state, and national level to determine where the current problem lies. While there is no silver bullet that will end the backlog overnight, the Franken-Walz legislation aims to help tackle the backlog by:

- Removing bureaucratic red tape by allowing veterans to see local doctors for their initial diagnosis and avoid long wait times at VA hospitals. This will conserve the VA's resources and enable quicker, more accurate rating decisions for veterans.
- Requiring the VA to swiftly award interim benefits to disabled veterans based off their initial diagnosis when the diagnosis clearly supports such awards. This will allow veterans to receive important benefits quicker, while the VA continues to review their cases.
- Authorizing VA to pay housing benefits under the GI Bill to student veterans in a more timely way.

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