

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC**

January 3, 2008

The Honorable James B. Peake  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Peake:

I am writing on behalf of Gulf War veterans who seek a better way to communicate with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). As you know, many of these veterans have felt neglected by the government – both the VA and the Defense Department – and while there are a wide range of issues they would like to raise, there is no common venue within the VA for them to raise their concerns. I am seeking a way to enhance communications and rebuild confidence between the VA and this constituency.

The only existing Gulf War-focused entity within the VA is the Research Advisory Committee (RAC), whose charter is solely focused on recommendations for medical research. These veterans, however, seek an entity with which issues of treatment, benefits, and family support issues can be raised. While these issues are brought to the RAC, simply because its charter deals with Gulf War Illness, the RAC is not equipped or authorized to address them.

I recommend, therefore, that you create a Gulf War Veteran Advisory Committee to address the entire range of issues that are unique to Gulf War veterans. I believe such a committee will help to identify and prioritize unmet needs and to streamline improvements to care and services for these veterans.

As you know, the VA has recently put together the OIF/OEF Veterans and Families Committee to provide support to veterans of these most recent conflicts, and I applaud the VA for taking this initiative. I think we can provide better support to Gulf War veterans with the establishment of a similar committee focused on their needs as well.

In creating such a committee – a key benefit of which would be to empower Gulf War veterans with a voice in their treatment – it would be critical to include veterans of the conflict themselves in such an effort. I would hope that the committee would have some autonomy, its own staff, and some members of the committee from outside the government. I believe this would help the committee build trust with Gulf War veterans and therefore improve the committee's ability to succeed from the outset.

I welcome your thoughts on this initiative and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Chet Edwards  
Member of Congress

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