

Press Release

**June 12, 2006**

**SCHAKOWSKY CALLS FOR OMBUDSMAN TO HELP VETERANS AFFECTED BY DATA BREACH**

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, ranking member on the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, today sent a letter to Veterans Affairs Secretary James Nicholson requesting that the VA hire an ombudsman dedicated to assisting veterans whose personal information was lost in a data breach. Schakowsky has led Democratic efforts to pass the DATA Act, a bipartisan bill that passed the Energy and Commerce Committee with unanimous support, which would protect the personal information of consumers and ensure that they receive notification in case their information has been exposed.

The full text of the letter is below:

Secretary R. James Nicholson  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Freemont Ave.  
Washington D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

As the Ranking Member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee of Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, I was very concerned to learn about the extent of the recent data breach at the Veterans Administration and the type of personal information lost. The VA has taken the right steps in the aftermath by hiring a new Special Advisor for Information Security and setting up website links and a toll-free number to assist affected veterans. I believe that in order to best serve the veterans who were put in harm's way by this breach, the VA should immediately take the further step of hiring an ombudsman dedicated only to assisting the impacted veterans.

The personal information that was stolen from the VA is all that is needed for a fraudster to take over the identities of the veterans in compromised the database. The potential damage

that could be inflicted could be financially and emotionally devastating. Personal safety could also be at serious risk.

While the web links and toll-free number the VA has establish are valuable resources for veterans, it is important that someone be put in charge of coordinating those efforts and ensuring that each veteran is provided with the specific assistance that he or she needs needed. An ombudsman could ensure that the VA is providing the affected veterans with all tools to help protect themselves from becoming victims of identity theft. This person could also ensure that each victim of identity theft is provided with the individual assistance necessary to contain the damage and recover what is lost because of this crime. The effort to protect those who have protected us deserves the focused attention of someone whose only responsibility is helping those veterans who have been compromised by the VA's mishandling of their personal information. I believe an ombudsman is required for that to happen. I highly encourage you to create and fill such a position by the end of this month.

I appreciate your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress