

CONGRESS MICRO-MISMANAGEMENT HARMING VETERANS

SENATE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE FAILING HOLDS FEW OVERSIGHT HEARINGS

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has held just 16 hearings in the 113th Congress, only five of which were oversight hearings.¹ The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has held just two field hearing during the 113th Congress, one in Alaska ("The State of Veterans Services in Alaska," 8/26/13) and the other in Georgia ("Ensuring Veterans Receive the Care They Deserve - Addressing VA Mental Health Program Management," 8/7/13),² yet no hearings were held in the areas experiencing deaths as a result of poor VA care, such as South Carolina.

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, by contrast, has held 60 hearings in the 113th Congress, 34 of which were oversight hearings and has been very aggressive holding the VA accountable.³ The House Committee also reported out a bill (H.R. 2189) to help resolve the backlog of disability claims at the VA that was overwhelming approved by the House of Representatives by a vote on 404 to 1 last year. The bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs in October where it continues to languish and wait for consideration, much like the veterans who are waiting for services which that bill seeks to address.

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs was featured in *Wastebook* in 2012 for being among the most idle committees in the entire Congress in terms of the number of hearings held. The committee conducted just 16 hearings in 12 months, fewer than all but seven other committees in both chambers of Congress.⁴

FORMER DEFENSE SECRETARY GATES SAYS CONGRESS IS ONE OF THE PRINCIPLE CULPRITS CAUSING POOR CARE FOR VETERANS

"One of the principle culprits" for the failure to get vets the care they need in a timely manner is Congress," according to former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. "The Congress has micromanaged veterans affairs in such a way that changing anything that has to do with dealing with veterans requires literally an act of Congress."⁵

"We would try pilot programs where we would try to expedite disability evaluations and things like that ... to be able to get them done in 100 or 150 days rather than a year or two years or

¹ "Hearings 113th Congress," Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs website, accessed January 28, 2014; <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings> .

² "Hearings 113th Congress," Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs website, accessed January 28, 2014; <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings> .

³ "113th Congress Hearings," House Committee on Veterans' Affairs website, accessed January 28, 2014; <http://veterans.house.gov/legislation/hearings> .

⁴ Office of Senator Tom Coburn, *Wastebook* 2012, appendix, page 132; http://www.coburn.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?a=Files.Serve&File_id=b7b23f66-2d60-4d5a-8bc5-8522c7e1a40e

⁵ "Exclusive - Robert Gates Extended Interview," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, January 15, 2014; <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-january-15-2014/exclusive---robert-gates-extended-interview-pt--2> .

three years or more, but we couldn't expand that, once we showed it would work, without a change in the law, and that proved almost insurmountable," Secretary Gates said.

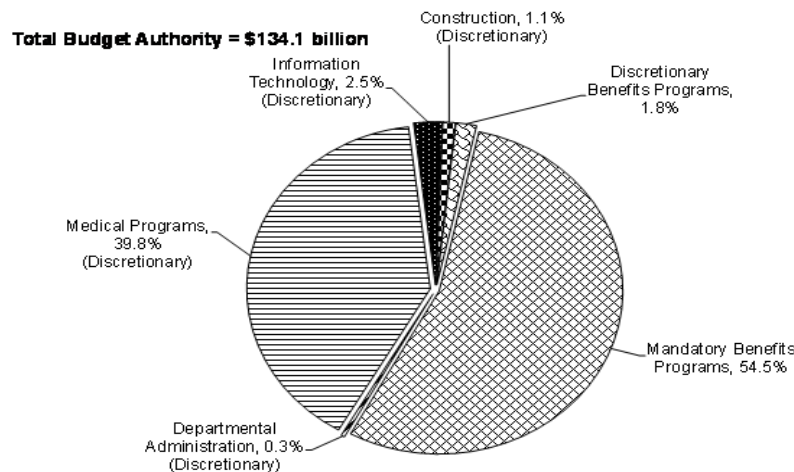
CARE DELAYS ARE NOT THE RESULT OF A LACK OF MONEY

The annual budget of the Department of Veterans Affairs exceeds \$134 billion.⁶

The delays in vets care is "not for a lack of money," says former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.⁷

Case in point: More than 20 veterans have died or are dying due to late diagnosis and treat of cancer at the Williams Jennings Bryan Dorn Veterans Medical Center in Columbia, South Carolina. "Documents show that only a third of that \$1 million appropriated by Congress to fix the problem was used for its intended purpose at Dorn: to pay for care for veterans on a waiting list. At the same time, the documents show, the waiting list at Dorn kept growing to 3,800 patients in December 2011."⁸

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs should be aggressively investigating why veterans at this facility and elsewhere are not receiving timely access to care and why the money appropriated is not being spent properly.



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⁶ Sidath Viranga Panangala, "Veterans' Medical Care: FY2014 Appropriations," Congressional Research Service, August 14, 2013.

⁷ "Exclusive - Robert Gates Extended Interview," The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, January 15, 2014; <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/wed-january-15-2014/exclusive---robert-gates-extended-interview-pt--2>.

⁸ Scott Bronstein, Nelli Black and Drew Griffin, "Hospital delays are killing America's war veterans," CNN, November 20, 2013; <http://www.cnn.com/2013/11/19/health/veterans-dying-health-care-delays/>.

⁹ Sidath Viranga Panangala, "Veterans' Medical Care: FY2014 Appropriations," Congressional Research Service, August 14, 2013.