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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515-3809

June 18, 2014

The Honorable Sloan Gibson  
Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Gibson,

In light of recent disclosures that unclaimed veterans remains have been sitting on the shelves in the basements of funeral homes across the nation for decades, we write to you today to voice our concern and request action by the Department to rectify the situation and ensure all of our veterans get the proper and dignified burial they deserve.

It is our understanding after looking into this matter further that there are several barriers making proper identification and burial of these unclaimed veterans remains difficult. Mr. Ron Metros, Pennsylvania Chapter 5 President of Rolling Thunder, and Mr. John Fabry, Pennsylvania State Coordinator of the Missing In America Project (MIAP), brought to our attention that as they volunteer to fulfill the mission of MIAP, which is to "locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremated remains of American veterans through the joint efforts of private, state and federal organizations," they are encountering many obstacles. For example, some cooperating funeral home directors have allowed MIAP to enter into their place of business and locate all unclaimed remains to then identify these individuals as veterans and see if they are eligible for burial benefits through the National Cemetery Administration. However, not all funeral home directors cooperate for fear of third party information liability concerns. Another dilemma is that some of these identified veterans served during WWII and the Vietnam War but their next of kin are deceased or cannot be located. Also, the NCA's process of ensuring deceased veterans are buried with dignity and respect does not exist. There are no checks and balances in the process to ensure the veteran who is approved for burial benefits was ever actually buried.

It is estimated that there are 1,000 unclaimed veterans remains in every state. The Missing In America Project buried 25 veterans at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies in Pennsylvania on May 15, 2014. This is an ongoing problem across the nation. As the efforts of these selfless individuals whose heart and soul carries the burden of bringing our heroes to their final resting place is commended it is not a burden they should have to carry alone. It is up to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs with oversight from Congress to ensure that America's

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servicemen and women are treated with dignity and respect from the time they swear the oath to defend our great nation until the bugle plays the last note of taps.

We are respectfully requesting that you begin a study immediately covering the following four areas of concern: (1) determine the scope of issues relating to unclaimed remains of veterans, including an estimate of the number of unclaimed remains of veterans; (2) assess the effectiveness of the procedures of the Department of Veterans Affairs for claiming and interring unclaimed remains of veterans; (3) identify and assess State and local laws that affect the ability of the Secretary to identify, claim, and inter unclaimed remains of veterans; (4) develop recommendations for such legislative or administrative action as the Secretary considers appropriate.

This action is supported by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Missing In America Project Pennsylvania Chapter, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Rolling Thunder Pennsylvania Chapter 5, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Vietnam Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the National Funeral Directors Association, all of whom voiced support for legislation, H.R. 4446, requiring this study by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We request your prompt consideration of and response to this issue. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this issue, please contact my Defense Fellow, Anna Lloyd, at [anna.lloyd@mail.house.gov](mailto:anna.lloyd@mail.house.gov) or 202-225-2431.

Sincerely,



**BILL SHUSTER**  
Member of Congress



**STEVE STIVERS**  
Member of Congress



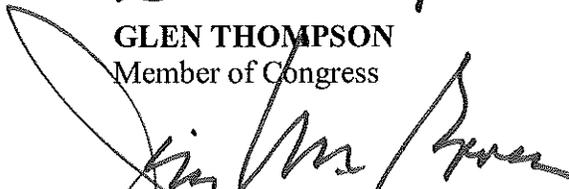
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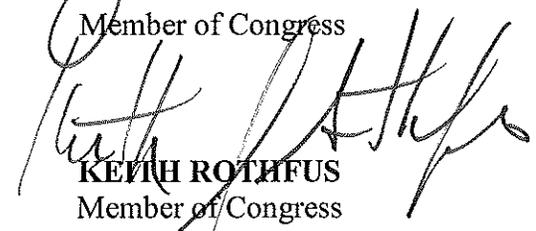
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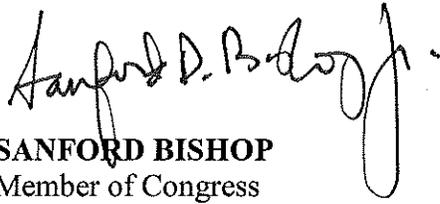
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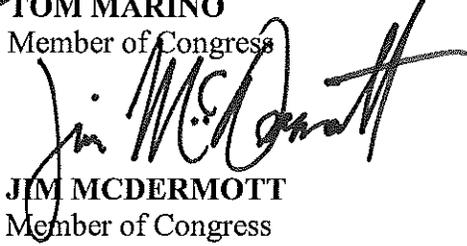
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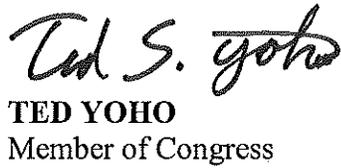
  
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