

Author Full Name : Anonymous**Received Date :** 10/18/2024 04:52 PM**Comments Received :**

Strong calls attention to Veterans Affairs' shortfalls in Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System
June 20, 2024 • Press Release

WASHINGTON — Earlier this week, Congressman Dale W. Strong (AL-05) wrote Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Denis R. McDonough, to express concern over the efficiency of the VA's Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS).

The BTSSS is the VA's web-based travel reimbursement program. Both Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG) and Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviews have found significant issues with the system that have complicated the travel reimbursement process for veterans nationwide.

"Over the past eighteen months, my office has received countless complaints about the BTSSS and requests for assistance to navigate the VA's reimbursement bureaucracy. These concerns include technical glitches and usability issues, processing delays, and the discouragement of paper claims, among other things," Strong wrote in the letter.

Almost 9.8%, or nearly 57,200 residents, of the population of Alabama's Fifth Congressional District have veteran status, a higher rate than both Alabama at large and the majority of Congressional districts nationwide. The nearest VA hospital for North Alabama veterans is in Birmingham, AL, meaning many veterans in Congressman Strong's district rely on BTSSS to reimburse their travel to and from the Birmingham VA hospital.

Strong continued, "This report [May 2024 GAO report, 'Additional Assessment of Mileage Reimbursement Data and Veterans' Travel Costs Needed,'] highlights that the Veterans' Health Agency is not accurately tracking the total cost of veterans' travel to VA appointments, which could assist with further program evaluation and help inform future VA decisions regarding resource allocation and expanding options for community care, which in turn would help alleviate the need to use BTSSS so frequently."

In the letter, Strong requested Secretary McDonough's response to three specific questions:

Does the VA plan to implement the four recommendations made in the May 2024 GAO report (GAO-24-106816)?

How does the VA plan to address system bugs and processing delays within the BTSSS to ensure that all veterans, regardless of their preferred submission method, receive timely reimbursements?

What plans exist to expand resources and options for care available to veterans in Alabama's Fifth Congressional District?

The full text of Congressman Strong's letter to Secretary McDonough can be read at [https://strong.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/strong.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024%2006%2017%20\(Strong\)%20Letter%20to%20VA%20Secretary%20re%20BTSSS.pdf](https://strong.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/strong.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024%2006%2017%20(Strong)%20Letter%20to%20VA%20Secretary%20re%20BTSSS.pdf)

<https://strong.house.gov/media/press-releases/strong-calls-attention-veterans-affairs-shortfalls-beneficiary-travel-self>