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May 23, 2006

The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield  
Deputy Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Deputy Secretary Mansfield:

I am writing to express my serious concern regarding the Department's recent revelation that, earlier this month, personal information regarding America's 26.5 million veterans was stolen from an employee's home.

This incident is deeply troubling for many reasons. First and foremost, I share the concern of our nation's veterans about the potential for misuse of their names, birthdates, and Social Security numbers, and the consequences – both personal and financial – that could result.

Second, the theft raises serious questions about the safeguards VA has in place to prevent employees from putting sensitive information about our veterans at risk, whether intentionally or not. When veterans turn over their information to the agency that is responsible for serving them, they must be able to depend on that agency to protect it at all costs.

Third, I am concerned that the Department of Veterans Affairs may not have acted as quickly as it could have to notify veterans about the theft. When personal information like this is compromised, time is of the utmost importance. Yet, Congress and the American public learned yesterday that the theft occurred sometime earlier this month. Veterans and their representatives deserve to know how long VA has known about the theft, and whether an effort could have been made to notify them sooner.

Our nation owes a debt to our veterans that can never be fully repaid. It is deeply concerning to me that the very agency responsible for providing these veterans with the care and services they have earned failed to protect their most basic personal information.

The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield

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While I am encouraged by some of the steps VA has taken in the wake of the theft to help veterans protect themselves against data theft, I strongly urge you and your department to do everything in your power to ensure the stolen information is not used illegally, and that this sort of security lapse never happens again. Our veterans deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Salazar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "K" and "S".

Ken Salazar  
United States Senator