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Supports legislation to protect veterans from id theft

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Washington, DC - Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) cosponsored the "Veterans' Identity Protection Act of 2006" (H.R. 5455), legislation aimed at helping the 26.5 million veterans whose personal data was stolen from the home of a VA employee earlier this month.

"Our veterans have put their lives on the line in service to this country. In turn, this Administration, in the careless handling of their personal information, does a disservice to veterans," stated Congresswoman Matsui. "As any law enforcement official or id theft victim will tell you, a quick response can prevent further harm. Yet in waiting weeks to notify veterans, this Administration denied these veterans this critical damage control time. Veterans should not have to pay for the government's mistake; the least we can do - in addition to a very sincere apology - is cover the cost for them to monitor their credit."

This legislation will protect veterans from identity theft by calling on the VA to:

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Provide veterans with one year of free credit monitoring - to alert them of changes in their credit in order to stop the theft before it gets out of control.

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Provide veterans with one free credit report each year for two years after the end of credit monitoring, in addition to the free credit report available under the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

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Authorize \$1.25 billion in emergency funds for the first year of implementation.

Earlier this week, VA Secretary James Nicholson announced that sensitive data collected by the government for approximately 26.5 million veterans — names, Social Security numbers and dates of birth as well as some disability ratings — was stolen from the home of a VA official who had removed this data from the VA and taken it home. A number of law enforcement agencies are working to recover this data. While the FBI and the VA Inspector General’s office are looking into the matter, Congresswoman Matsui is informing veterans and their families to take proactive steps to protect themselves from misuse of their personal information.

Veterans can visit www.firstgov.gov as well as www.va.gov/opa to get more information on this matter. The VA has set up a manned call center that veterans may call to get information about this situation and learn more about consumer identity protections: 1-800-FED INFO (333-4636), from 8 am to 9 pm (EDT), Monday-Saturday.

Congresswoman Matsui also supports several pieces of legislation that would work to reduce id theft. One piece of legislation, H.R. 1078, would protect an individual’s Social Security number and make it a crime to buy or sell that number. Further, the Congresswoman supports legislation that would regulate information brokers — those that maintain and sell lists of personal information to companies that offer opportunities for such items as credit cards, housing, and magazines.

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