



June 28, 2007

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
528 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Reid and Minority Leader McConnell:

Veterans for Common Sense (VCS) urges you to please support S. 849, the Openness Promotes Effectiveness in our National Government Act (OPEN Government Act) of 2007, as introduced by Senator Patrick Leahy and Senator John Cornyn. As the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) approaches its 41st birthday this July 4, this important law is long overdue for fundamental reforms necessary to make it work as Congress intended and citizens expect.

The FOIA remains an important tool for veterans and their families to obtain military records and benefit information at key government agencies like the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD). For example, VCS used FOIA to reveal the fact that 229,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans were already treated at VA medical centers since their return from combat. Additionally, 180,000 filed disability compensation claims against VA. This explains, in part, why VA was short \$3 billion in 2005. VCS shared the VA reports with *The New York Times* for several articles. And this allowed VCS to ask Congress to add \$1.8 billion in emergency appropriations this year for VA to hire more doctors and claims processors.

The reforms contained in the bi-partisan OPEN Government Act would make the FOIA a more efficient and effective tool for the public, veterans, and journalists. Today, Veterans for Common Sense and others who use FOIA to get vital information from the government face a system plagued by delay and roadblocks to access. Enactment of the OPEN Government Act of 2007 would help restore public faith in government. We would appreciate knowing your views so we may share them with our members.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Sullivan
Executive Director
Veterans for Common Sense
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Washington, DC 20003
Paul@VeteransForCommonSense.org

cc: The Hon. Patrick Leahy and The Hon. Arlen Specter