

(Washington, DC) Today, Congressman Charlie Gonzalez expressed serious concerns over the theft of 26.5 million veterans' electronic records from a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employee's home in Maryland. The employee who removed the records was not authorized to take them and the disks were subsequently stolen from his home during a burglary.

The stolen records contain identifying information of veterans from all the services who were discharged from about 1975 onward. It includes their names, social security numbers, and dates of birth, as well as some disability ratings. The data did not include any of the VA's electronic health records or any financial information.

Congressman Gonzalez was greatly dismayed that a large number of veterans in San Antonio could now become victims of identity theft due to the theft of these records. He stated, "identity theft is a growing concern among Americans as such incidents occur with surprising frequency. I am troubled that the federal government may now be contributing to this problem. The American people should be able to feel confident that their personal information is not accessible by unauthorized persons." He added, "I want to help get the word out to veterans regarding steps they should take in response to this situation while we look at all appropriate measures to prevent this type of event from occurring ever again." The Congressman has indicated he supports holding congressional hearings to investigate the breach and is considering legislation to address this incident.

"At this point, there has been no evidence that this missing data has been used illegally," Congressman Gonzalez noted. "However," he continued, "it is imperative that veterans carefully monitor their bank and credit card statement, and any other statements relating to recent financial transactions so that they can uncover any suspicious activity as soon as it occurs." It has been advised that veterans should not contact financial institutions or cancel credit cards and bank accounts, unless suspicious activity is detected. If they notice unusual activity, they should immediately report it to the financial institution involved and contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for further guidance.

The VA will send individual notification letters to veterans whose personal data may have been compromised. They have set up a manned call center where veterans can call to get information and learn more about consumer identity protections. The toll free number is 1-800-FED INFO (1-800-333-4636) and it will operate from 8 am to 9 pm (EDT), Monday-Saturday for as long as needed.

The FTC recommends the following four steps if one detects suspicious activity:

1. Contact the fraud department of one of the three major credit bureaus:

- Equifax:

1-800-525-6285; www.equifax.com ;
P.O. Box 740241,
Atlanta, GA 30374-0241

- Experian:

1-888-EXPERIAN (397-3742); www.experian.com ;
P.O. Box 9532,
Allen, Texas 75013

- TransUnion:

1-800-680-7289; www.transunion.com ;
Fraud Victim Assistance Division,
P.O. Box 6790,
Fullerton, CA 92834-6790

2. Close any accounts that have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.

3. File a police report with your local police or the police in the community where the identity theft took place.

4. File a complaint with the FTC through its Identity Theft Hotline:

- by telephone: 1-877-438-4338;

- online: www.consumer.gov/idtheft ;

• by mail: Identity Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington DC 20580.