

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 10, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins:

We write today regarding a memo issued by your Chief of Staff on March 4, and later proudly announced by you via Twitter, detailing a plan to reduce the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) workforce to 2019 levels. Over the past five years, there have been monumental bipartisan expansions and improvements to veterans' healthcare and benefits. Your proposal puts all of them at risk. And we believe it is blatantly dishonest to claim veterans' healthcare and benefits will not be impacted by the termination of up to 83,000 employees, including 20,000 veterans.

Since 2019, through the PACT Act, VA has implemented the largest expansion of eligibility for earned care and benefits to veterans and their families in decades. Congress has also worked in a bipartisan manner to provide critical funds and tools for VA to work more closely with states and local organizations to address veteran suicide and veteran homelessness through the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act (Public Law 116-171). And we have worked with the Department to develop policy to further address veterans' mental health care needs in the Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act (Public Law 117-21), the COMPACT Act (Public Law 116-214), and the REACH Act (included in Public Law 117-328).

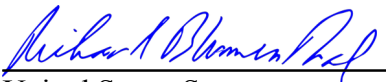
Additionally, the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (Public Law 116-315) made massive improvements to women veterans' health care through the Deborah Sampson Act, improved veterans' timely access to health care, established greater outreach and engagement with Native Veterans, and streamlined veterans' access to earned disability benefits online. The Joseph Maxwell Cleland and Robert Joseph Dole Memorial Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act (included in Public Law 117-328) improved access to care for rural veterans, bolstered services for aging veterans, and expanded programs for veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness. And the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (Public Law 118-210) gave VA tools to hire additional highly-skilled physicians, serve additional veterans experiencing homelessness, expand access to dental care, improve the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, establish a pilot program for assisted living for veterans, and more. To support the proper implementation and execution of these laws, Congress worked in a bipartisan and bicameral manner to increase appropriations while VA bolstered its capacity to deliver for veterans, including hiring thousands of additional staff. Your choice to unilaterally cut staff and redistribute associated funds will unquestionably harm veterans and is in direct opposition of Congressional intent.

Reducing VA's workforce to 2019 levels will reverse the progress made since that time, including a 16 percent increase in outpatient visits and a 23 percent increase in veterans and survivors receiving disability compensation benefits, as well as additional investments in critical bipartisan priorities such as a 50 percent increase for mental health care, an 85 percent increase for caregiver support, and a 66 percent increase for cemeteries and memorial benefits. Fewer staff to provide outpatient appointments will cause veterans to wait longer for care, and the costs of that care will only increase over time as their medical conditions worsen. Reductions in mental health care will undoubtedly leave more veterans abandoned as they attempt to overcome the invisible wounds of war. Rolling back caregiver support will result in more veterans placed in long-term care, at a much greater cost to the Department and severely limiting quality of life for them and their families. Since VA's solemn mission is to serve veterans and put them first, we would like to see evidence of how these cuts will impact the 20,000 veterans – making up 25 percent of the approximately 80,000 employees to be cut – you plan to terminate, as well as and the millions of veterans they served.

As we continue to first learn of these disastrous ideas from VA employees and veterans, we will continue to speak out and fight on behalf of those men and women unjustly and immorally harmed by your actions. We are not deterred or fooled by your political theatrics that seek to defend your actions with half-truths and vague, empty promises – and neither are veterans. We will make sure the public knows the truth – that cutting back to 2019 staffing levels means firing over 18,000 nurses, ten percent of the VA police force, nearly 10,000 schedulers, and more than thirty percent of the Veterans Benefits Administration staff. And we will continue to share the stories of veterans you have fired who served their country for decades, were honorably discharged, and had stellar performance reviews while working at VA – before you callously and illegally terminated them.

We urge you to start putting veterans first – to review VA's own data, listen to your leadership and frontline staff on the ground serving veterans every day, and talk to veterans and their families. When you do, you will come to the one and only legitimate conclusion – that massive, arbitrary staff cuts will not make the Department more efficient nor improve care and benefits for veterans. In fact, they will have the opposite effect, and they will dishonor the contract the United States made with these veterans when they signed up to risk their lives in service to our nation.

Sincerely,



United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator



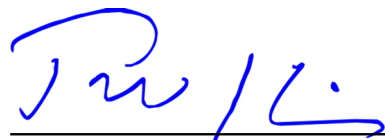
Mark R. Warner
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Tim Kaine
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Amy Klobuchar
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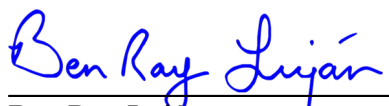
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Jacky Rosen
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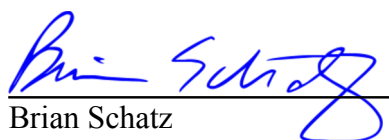
Maria Cantwell
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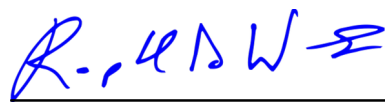
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Jeanne Shaheen
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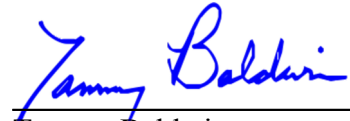
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



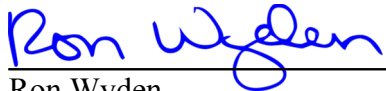
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