

United States Senate

June 25, 2018

The Honorable Robert L. Wilkie
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Wilkie:

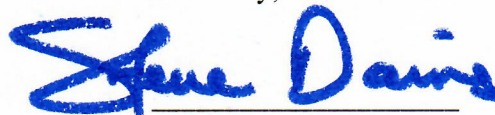
Congratulations on your recent nomination to be the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I would like to take this opportunity to raise a few issues that are impacting Montana veterans.

Montana is proud to claim one of the highest rates of veterans per capita in the nation. Many of these veterans receive care at one of Montana's seventeen VA facilities; yet many others live hours from the nearest VA facility with few options to treat injuries incurred in the line of duty. VA Choice was intended to overcome those geographic barriers, and serve as a lifeline for veterans in small towns and rural areas. Unfortunately, the value of Veterans Choice was never realized in Montana due to mismanagement by the third party provider. This company damaged trust with Montana's veterans and health care providers. I was pleased to support the VA MISSION Act, which was recently signed into law by President Trump and significantly overhauls the VA's community care programs. As you assume the office of Secretary, I implore you to restore trust where it has been broken, and foster new relationships that will ensure veterans have timely access to care.

Those veterans who do receive care at a traditional VA facility report to me that they are having increasing trouble scheduling appointments with their providers due to shortages across the VA Healthcare System. Physician shortages have been a leading challenge for the VA nationwide for several years, yet the impact of these shortages is disproportionately felt in large rural states where suitable alternatives may be few and far between. I urge you to aggressively solve this perennial problem once and for all, leveraging the new resources provided in the VA MISSION Act, to recruit and retain the most qualified providers who are up to the task of delivering the quality of care our nation's heroes deserve.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to working with you to better serve Montana's veterans. I invite you to join me on an upcoming visit to Fort Harrison to hear from Montana's heroes directly, and to meet with Montana VA leadership as they implement solutions to these ongoing challenges.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator