

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 6, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Collins,

Despite inheriting a Department making historic gains in trust from veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) serving more veterans than ever before, you have frequently cited the Department's inclusion on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) High Risk List (HRL) to justify this Administration's unprecedented assault on veterans and the VA workforce. However, contrary to your public rhetoric about improving management at VA, you have actively undermined VA's tools and personnel critical to improving the delivery of health care and benefits to veterans - including specific actions that directly hinder reforms recommended in GAO's HRL. Today, we write to hear directly from you about the specific actions you have taken to address the underlying concerns that have placed VA on the HRL in the three key areas - modernizing disability programs, improving health care, and acquisition management. Additionally, we need to know more about your sweeping plans to fire large swaths of the Department's workforce and dismantle oversight structures that serve to improve VA's standing on the HRL.

GAO has identified three specific areas responsible for VA's inclusion on its HRL - *Modernizing Federal Disability Programs* (shared with the Social Security Administration), *Managing Risks and Improving VA Health Care*, and *VA Acquisition Management*. To evaluate VA's efforts to address these identified areas, GAO assesses five categories of action: 1) leadership commitment, 2) capacity, 3) action plan, 4) monitoring, and 5) demonstrated progress. In its 2025 report to Congress, GAO found that VA "met" three categories and "partially met" two others within the area of *Modernizing Federal Disability Programs*. Under *Managing Risks and Improving VA Health Care*, VA "partially met" all five of the action categories, and "met" one category and "partially met" four others in the area of *VA Acquisition Management*. To make further progress, GAO laid out a clear path for further reforms which include developing and updating VA strategies and policies, managing VA's supply chain and acquisition workforce, enhanced training, and providing consistent leadership and execution of program management.

Fundamentally, these actions all require a combination of improvements in people, process, and technology that can only be achieved through focused leadership and a stable group of qualified employees and managers. GAO makes it very clear that implementing critical reforms requires well-trained, well-staffed, and well-resourced program offices who have the ability to procure, where appropriate, relevant information technology or other expert services to help them manage and accelerate reforms. All of this work has been underway at VA for more than 10 years, but it needs continued investment, a stable workforce, and substantive leadership engagement. This GAO guidance has provided VA leadership with a roadmap to improve outcomes for veterans, not to pursue reckless policies with little to no analysis that ultimately threaten positive outcomes.

Despite your public discourse prioritizing the importance of GAO's work and the need for reforms at VA, your actions have directly undermined VA's efforts to address GAO's recommendations and call into question your sincerity. These actions show a purposeful and methodical dismantling of the human-capital and operational infrastructure veterans rely on to receive their earned health care and benefits, and that VA employees use to monitor and improve service delivery. Among these actions are the illegal and indiscriminate firing of 2,400 VA employees, including the termination of employees whose job focused on fraud detection within veterans' benefits programs. There is no question your planned termination of an additional 83,000 employees will decimate program management and oversight functions on an unprecedented scale. You claim these men and women are part of a "middle layer" of bureaucracy, but we know they perform valuable program planning and management, internal controls and risk mitigation, and provide critical operational support for facilities, information technology and cyber security services, medical supply distribution, and call centers. Additionally, while implementing the President's hiring freeze, you neglected to exempt program oversight and audit personnel. You also directed the mass cancellation of VA contracts, in partnership with DOGE, which you falsely claimed were focused solely on producing "PowerPoint presentations and meeting minutes." In reality, many of these contracts addressed efforts to detect and prevent waste to include billions of dollars in improper or duplicative benefit or health care payments. In other words, you cut contracts focused on bolstering VA's initiatives tasked with addressing the specific areas driving VA's inclusion of the HRL.

As lawmakers who have made serving veterans a central focus of our time in Congress, we will never be satisfied with the status quo for veterans, their families, and taxpayers - that is why we have worked, on a bipartisan basis, to pass dozens of laws to improve services for veterans, reform Department operations, and root out waste. In fact, Congress has been consistently engaged in oversight of the Department. And while we can mandate oversight and accountability, we cannot legislate leadership or competence. For that, Congress traditionally relies on the Department Secretary, supported by VA's dedicated and experienced civil servants. In that regard, and to understand the oversight actions you have taken or plan to take, and your goals for the remainder of the Fiscal Year, please respond to the following requests:

1. Provide a list of five specific actions you personally have directed or taken since becoming Secretary related to accelerating VA's work to address the three specific VA issues areas identified in the HRL.
2. Provide a list of five specific actions you personally have directed or taken since becoming Secretary related to accelerating VA's work to change processes and programs to address issues identified in the FY 2024 Inspector General's Report on VA's Major Management Challenges.
3. Provide an update on the Department's implementation of priority GAO recommendations consistent with the requirements of Section 7008 of the Isakson/Roe law (Public Law 116-315).
4. Explain in detail how the mass firings of employees, including those that manage and conduct oversight and program reforms to improve VA performance, your hiring freeze on audit and oversight positions, as well as the planned termination of up to 83,000 additional VA employees will help remove VA's designation on GAO's HRL or close the recommendations in the VA IG Major Management Challenges report. Please explain who will conduct the oversight and auditing work of those employees slated for or already terminated.

5. Provide us with your goal of the number of VA GAO and OIG recommendations closed by the end of FY 2025.
6. Provide a list of how many of the employees dismissed from January 20, 2025, to the date of this letter, occupied positions with at least 30 percent of their duties in their position description focused on waste, fraud, and abuse detection and prevention; financial management and internal controls; program management; or related oversight.
7. Of the contracts you have directed to be cancelled, explain how the work in each contract focused on fraud prevention, identifying waste, and eliminating duplicative payments will be absorbed by the Department.
8. Because of your frequent discussion of the need for improved infrastructure for medical and other facilities to serve veterans in the context of the GAO HRL recommendations, provide a detailed explanation for how you intend to address VA's critical infrastructure needs to improve services for veterans when your FY 2026 budget requests flat funding or reductions in three out of four of the key construction programs (i.e., Major Construction, Minor Construction, and State Home and State Cemetery Construction Grant Programs).

Significant work remains, yet under leadership from both parties and continued Congressional oversight, VA has made progress towards addressing the underlying issues driving its designation on the HRL - all of which were in place during the first Trump Administration. While we are pleased with the efforts by former Administrations, we have strong concerns you have derailed that progress, and made it much more – not less – likely that VA will be included on the HRL for years to come. We will not be satisfied until GAO's recommendations are fully addressed by VA. And we will continue working in a bipartisan manner to push the Department to meet these goals and improve service delivery for all veterans and taxpayers.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Mark Takano
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs