



# TESTER WINS IN 2020 VETERANS LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE

On January 5, 2021, the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 was signed into law. This bill, unanimously passed by both the House and Senate, includes more than a dozen provisions authored and championed by Senator Tester to greatly improve veterans' access to top-notch care and benefits.

## EXPANDS SERVICES FOR WOMEN VETERANS (THE DEBORAH SAMPSON ACT)

- Creates a dedicated Office of Women's Health at VA, expands reintegration and readjustment group counseling retreats for women veterans and their family members, and bolsters call center services for women veterans
- Eliminates barriers to care by staffing every VA health facility with a dedicated women's health primary care provider, training clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy and improve the environment of care for women veterans
- Bolsters supportive services by providing access to legal services for women veterans, expanding child care for veterans

## IMPROVES ACCESS TO EARNED BENEFITS

- Restores public access to Disability Benefits Questionnaires, which provide veterans and non-VA providers with easier access to disability compensation claims, helping reduce the claims backlog
- Expands monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits to more surviving spouses and dependents by lowering the age at which a surviving spouse may still receive indemnity compensation benefits at the point of remarriage
- Ensures that servicemembers who contract COVID-19 while serving will be eligible for VA benefits

## IMPROVES SERVICES FOR NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

- Removes copayments for Native American veterans who are accessing VA health care, bringing parity between Native American veterans who receive care at VA and Native Americans who receive services through the Department of Health and Human Services and the Indian Health Service
- Establishes a VA Advisory Committee on Tribal and Indian Affairs, which will facilitate communication and understanding between VA and Tribal governments in order to better address the unique barriers Native American veterans face when accessing VA services

## REDUCES BARRIERS TO CARE

- Requires VA to review its entire scheduling process — both in-house and for non-VA care — in order to improve veterans' access to timely care
- Directs VA to clarify its community care referral processes and improve training so VA staff are better equipped to direct veterans to the best health care option
- Requires VA to establish a national protocol for administering medical exams for volunteer drivers providing transportation for veterans who are unable to safely get to and from their appointments
- Removes barriers to VA grants that will allow organizations to make critical infrastructure upgrades to keep homeless veterans safe from COVID-19
- Expands military sexual trauma (MST) counseling eligibility to former members of the National Guard and Reserves

## ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS

- Increases VA's funding cap for veteran cemeteries from \$5 million to \$10 million annually in order to better assist states, territories, and tribal governments in covering the costs of operating and maintaining state-run veteran cemeteries
- Requires VA to take a more central and active role in protecting veterans from scams by developing a plan to address the financial exploitation of veterans