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June 18, 2022

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

I write today to request the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide outreach and support to veterans, their families, and communities affected by recent flooding across Montana. This historic flooding has washed out roads and bridges, damaged homes and businesses, and displaced many Montanans. Hospitals and nursing homes have been evacuated, including the Livingston HealthCare hospital and a nursing home in Red Lodge, with patients and residents being re-located. The danger has not passed, as the potential for future flooding remains with further rain and heatwaves predicted in these and other areas across the state. VA plays an important role in assisting veterans and the nation in times of crisis, including natural disasters and emergencies. I ask for VA's support to aid Montana veterans and families in their time of need during this once in a millennia catastrophe.

In keeping with VA's previous work locating and aiding veterans in natural disaster zones, I ask for the Department to reach out to all known veterans living in the flooded areas and evacuation zones. Many Montanans in the flood zones have been left without access to clean water or power. Veterans who have been displaced may also have unreliable access to essential medications or power for using CPAP machines or other health care equipment. Further, I request VA work with state and local authorities to identify any veterans who were being cared for in hospitals, nursing homes, or other health care facilities, who were evacuated and/or transferred to other locations. VA and VA Montana may be able to provide health care support to those affected veterans and ensure evacuations have not limited their ability to receive top-notch care.

Further, VA has been able to provide states and communities experiencing natural disasters with support through its Fourth Mission. I request the Department work with state and federal authorities to determine if the flooded areas and affected communities require any health care support from VA. This could include, but is not limited to, sharing bed space at VA Montana's Fort Harrison, sharing health care supplies and equipment, deploying a mobile medical unit, or sharing power or water resources. VA should also consider deploying a mobile Vet Center to the affected area or to shelters housing Montanans who were forced to evacuate their homes.

I would also urge the Department to determine if any veterans residing in or near the flooded areas are VA Home Loan recipients. VA could provide support by proactively contacting these veterans to see if they or their families need any assistance or support following the flooding. In addition, for veterans who lost access to their cars or other transportation, VA Montana could look into working with Disabled American Veterans (DAV) to see if DAV vans could be used to help provide emergency transportation to affected veterans and their families. Lastly, I would ask for the Veterans Benefits Administration to identify relief options for veterans affected by the Montana flooding. This could include, but is not limited to, permitting multiple no-fault reschedules for disability medical examinations, expediting claims processing, suspending all response deadlines, and suspending all adverse claims decisions for those impacted by the flooding in Montana.

I would like to commend VA for its steadfast support of our nation's veterans and the nation as a whole during the COVID-19 pandemic, and through wildfires, hurricanes, and emergencies of all kinds. VA continues to step up in times of crisis, and I hope the Department can extend a hand to Montanans in need affected by this devastating flooding. Thank you for your partnership in serving veterans in Montana and beyond.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
Chairman