

JOHNNY ISAKSON, GEORGIA,  
CHAIRMAN  
JERRY MORAN, KANSAS  
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS  
DEAN HELLER, NEVADA  
BILL CASSIDY, LOUISIANA  
MIKE ROUNDS, SOUTH DAKOTA  
THOM TILLIS, NORTH CAROLINA  
DAN SULLIVAN, ALASKA

JON TESTER, MONTANA,  
RANKING MEMBER  
PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON  
BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT  
SHERRON BROWN, OHIO  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT  
MAZIE HIRONO, HAWAII  
JOE MANCHIN III, WEST VIRGINIA

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 11, 2017

The Honorable David A. Shulkin  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Secretary Shulkin,

As you know, during his time as a candidate, President Trump made the creation of a White House veteran hotline a priority of his administration. Now, I want to ensure that during implementation, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is setting up a system that can meet the expectations of veterans and their loved ones, as well as taxpayers, as set by the President.

It is my understanding that VA currently has a number of channels through which complaints and concerns raised by veterans who receive care and benefits through VA are addressed. Each of VA's healthcare facilities and benefits offices has the capacity to address local issues that are raised directly by veterans and their family members, as well as issues brought to the facility by Congressional Members who hear from their constituents through casework. There are also numerous call center numbers available for healthcare enrollment, for questions about benefits, and other issues. In many of these cases, case file review, correction of a scheduling error, health record review, or other mitigation of the issue is done at the local level.

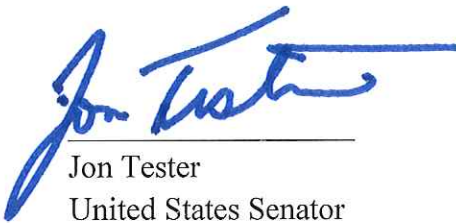
This new hotline set up by the White House is one additional way to collect data about veteran feedback, and I understand that there have been more than 21,000 calls to the new hotline since June. I applaud your recent decision to expand hiring to answer this hotline, and your decision to focus on hiring veterans to receive these calls.

As this line is fully implemented, I urge you to provide additional funding to health facilities and regional offices who will be doing the difficult work of determining the details of the situations described to operators, and providing a remedy. These employees on the ground are already receiving inputs from existing forums for complaints, and this added volume will have an impact on the timelines in which these employees are able to respond to complaints through existing channels. It is critical that VA ensure that complaints raised through multiple channels are deconflicted, prioritized properly, and tracked to ensure they are not needlessly reworked.

It is critical that you consider the downstream effects of the increased volume that will come due to the President's focus. Veterans and their family members will appropriately expect quick turnaround from each of these avenues of engagement. Because I share your desire for this hotline to be productive and effective, I am concerned that allowing volume to exceed capacity would not be the best way to serve veterans and could erode the levels of trust in VA that you have been working to rebuild over the last three years.

Thank you for considering expanding responsive staff at the regional office and individual medical facility level.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester  
United States Senator