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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 25, 2018

Honorable Michael J. Missal  
Inspector General  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Mr. Missal,

Recent events at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have raised questions about the extent of political influence that exists over what should be nonpolitical and non-partisan processes. One of these processes is the review of documents requested through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) process.


This longstanding disclosure requirement by Federal Agencies allows citizens to demand transparency from their government. In many cases, this is the mechanism through which family members have access to medical records of their loved ones. In other cases, it is the route through which media and other interested parties get answers and information after their requests to VA about policies and initiatives have gone unanswered.

The Committee has recently been told of concerns about the role of political appointees in the FOIA process, and their refusal to turn over emails from their government accounts that would be considered responsive. As a result, we are interested in getting an assessment of the role that political appointees play in the FOIA process, what types of oversight exist to ensure employees are providing all responsive material, and who makes determinations about what is or is not responsive to a request, and therefore, what is provided.

We request that you and your team look into this process at VA, to ensure that all responsive material is being provided, regardless of whether it is politically advantageous, embarrassing, or could shed light on errors or failures.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator




Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



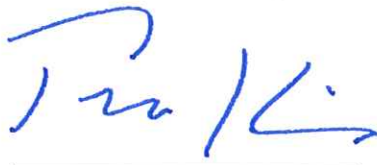
Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



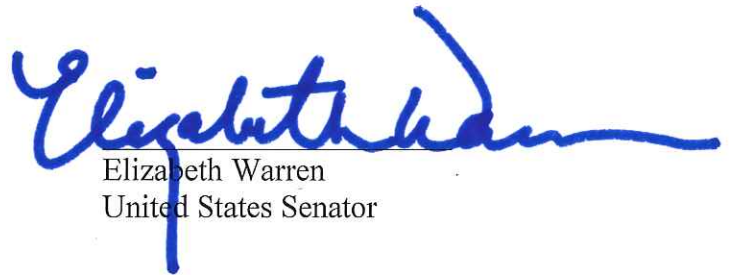
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