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United States Senate

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February 19, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to request that you add the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to the Defense Production Act Committee (DPAC). We made this same request to the previous Administration in June of 2020 and remain convinced of its importance and urgency.

As the nation's largest integrated health care system and the largest federal agency charged with the delivery of health care, VA has an integral role to play in DPAC. The current DPAC membership includes the Departments of Treasury, Homeland Security, State, Defense, Justice, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Energy. Also included are the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Central Intelligence Agency, the General Services Administration, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Whether through oversight or design, VA's exclusion is unique and unfortunate. VA's participation would efficiently facilitate veteran care and allow the agency to leverage its unique resources in response to public health emergencies, including the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through Defense Production Act (DPA) authorities being used to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, DPAC's statutory coordination responsibilities and interagency composition can help support positive health and economic outcomes across the country. Including the VA Secretary on DPAC will enhance the quality and timeliness of care for our nation's veterans, and given VA's national footprint and proficiency in pharmaceutical distribution, it will create a more in-depth knowledge base for executing a strong response to the current and future national emergencies.

As you know, ongoing global scarcity and elevated demand for personal protective equipment (PPE) and other medical supplies have caused significant disruptions in VA's primary health care mission to serve over 9 million veterans. Despite the pandemic, veterans continue to rely on VA for routine and acute care, both at VA facilities and through the Community Care Network. The federal government must ensure that VA can continue to provide this care, starting with providing VA with the means to ensure its medical facilities are stocked, and staff is appropriately equipped.

In addition to its primary health care mission, years ago Congress tasked VA with the mission to provide care and services to those "responding to, involved in, or otherwise affected by" a disaster or emergency. This so-called "fourth mission" authorizes the Department to support frontline health care workers serving the general public, and further makes VA relevant

to the work of DPAC. During the national emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, VA provided support to its state, local, and private-sector partners by opening bed space in VA facilities to the general public and sharing staff and PPE with community facilities.

Beyond executing its missions, VA would provide a unique perspective and set of resources and expertise to DPAC. The Secretary has access to an unparalleled workforce of frontline doctors, nurses, and administrators across the country who serve and understand the needs of their respective communities. This understanding can be critical in ensuring that the federal government targets its efforts and resources in the areas that are in the most need of support.

We thank you for your attention to this issue and your leadership throughout this national emergency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jon Tester
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jerry Moran". The signature is bold and blocky, with a horizontal line underneath.

Jerry Moran
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs