

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 4, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Having a Senate-confirmed leader in this role helps ensure VA is held accountable to deliver on its sacred obligation – to deliver the quality of health care and level of benefits our nation's veterans have earned. As Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I plan to hold you accountable for the assurances you made throughout your confirmation process. Together, we can accomplish a great deal on our shared priorities, and build upon the many bipartisan accomplishments achieved on behalf of veterans in recent years. However, your success as Secretary, as well as your credibility, will be largely determined by the initial actions you take upon assuming your new office.

During your confirmation hearing, I asked whether you would defend veterans and oppose outside efforts harmful to them and their families. You responded you would always “put the veteran first” and pledged not to “balance budgets on the back of veterans’ benefits.” I strongly believe veterans and VA need a leader who will keep the needs of veterans at the forefront, particularly in the face of pressure to scale back, cut costs, and pursue harmful policies that negatively impact veterans. I, therefore, appreciated your commitment to being this kind of advocate. But over the past two weeks, we have seen an unprecedented number of dangerous and unlawful actions from the White House that will decrease access to care for veterans across the country, delay delivery of recently-expanded benefits for toxic-exposed veterans and their families, and disrupt a wide array of critical services and opportunities they rely upon. This deluge of harmful actions is a betrayal of trust for veterans, and must be reversed quickly and unequivocally.

Today is your opportunity to make good on the assurances given during your confirmation hearing – to stand up for veterans in strong opposition to these arbitrary and harmful directives and to put veterans first. In the very first test of your leadership, I urge you to take the following actions without delay:

1. Exempt all VA positions from President Trump's hiring freeze.
2. Work with other federal agencies to ensure financial assistance programs for veterans are exempted from President Trump's funding freeze.
3. Work with President Trump to re-appoint Mr. Mike Missal as the VA Inspector General.
4. Ensure and clarify to veterans, CHAMPVA beneficiaries, and VA providers that Executive Order 14182, “Enforcing the Hyde Amendment,” does not apply to any of VA's operations.

5. Work with the Office of Personnel Management, and any other relevant parties, to address directives that only serve to remove due process and employment rights from public servants, and specifically:
 - a. rescind the delayed resignation offer from all VA employees,
 - b. cease and retract any atypical reviews and adverse actions against probationary employees initiated without cause, and
 - c. bar all VA positions from the new excepted service “policy/career” category, all of which exist solely to remove their due process and employment rights as public servants.
6. Rescind correspondence sent to VA employees threatening disciplinary action against those who do not inform on fellow employees regarding potential violations of President Trump’s crackdown on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility programs and staff.
7. Fully restrict, block, or remove Department of Government Efficiency employee access to all VA data systems and records, including those holding veterans’ private health, benefits, and related financial information, and VA employee personnel files.
8. Communicate clearly and comprehensively to all veterans and VA employees about the actions you will be taking to address #1-7 above.

Without immediate and decisive action, veterans will suffer from severed access to critical grant programs, a lack of oversight, and a politicized, divided, and depleted VA workforce. During your nomination hearing, you stated, “if I am confirmed by this body, the VA will be my mission. It’ll be the mission to take care of our veterans and to make sure they get the benefits that they deserve.” Today, I call on you to put those words into action, to rise to this challenge, and to immediately and strongly push back against President Trump’s destructive actions that have undermined VA’s mission and made it more difficult for our nation to fulfill its sacred obligation to veterans and their families who have already sacrificed on its behalf.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs