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# United States Senate

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TONY McCLAIN, STAFF DIRECTOR

November 23, 2020

The Honorable Emily Murphy  
Administrator  
General Services Administration  
1800 F Street NW  
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Administrator Murphy,

I am deeply concerned and frustrated that the General Services Administration (GSA) is refusing to move forward with the expected transition processes and procedures following the election of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as President and Vice President of the United States. It is deeply concerning that the Biden-Harris transition team has not been provided with the resources or cooperation it needs for a successful presidential transition, as required under the law. A continued failure to work in good faith with the transition team, and a failure to immediately proceed with the transition process will have a detrimental and inexcusable impact on our nation's veterans and their families.

The biggest current threat to the health and livelihood of veterans is the COVID-19 pandemic. As the largest integrated health care system in the country with the responsibility of backing up the nation's health care systems, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is on the frontlines of this crisis. It is therefore critical for VA to supply all of its most recent information on the Department's COVID-19 efforts, high risk areas, Fourth Mission work, PPE availability and challenges, and vaccine supply and distribution planning to the Biden-Harris transition team. The incoming Administration needs this information to assess how VA's current leadership is handling the pandemic in order to ensure the greatest needs and safety of veterans and VA staff are being properly addressed.

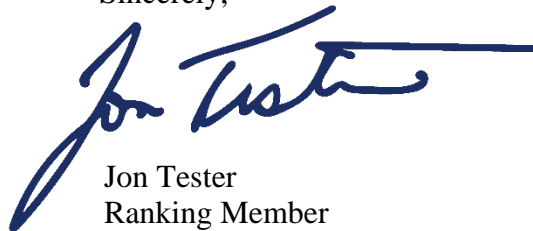
The latest Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report shows that the veteran suicide rate has yet to decrease below the rate from 2006. More than 17 veterans are still dying by suicide every day on average. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified mental health concerns and veterans cannot afford to wait for VA to implement crucial provisions in the recently passed *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act* (Public Law 116-171). This law will expand access to care, bolster the VA mental health workforce, improve access to telehealth and alternative treatment options, and conduct groundbreaking and independent research on veteran suicide prevention, all of which will have a major impact on ensuring all veterans have access to life-saving mental health care. The Biden-Harris transition team needs immediate and full access to the VA's current mental health and suicide prevention work, plans, and data, in addition to information on P.L. 116-171 implementation to date, so the new Administration can hit the ground running on day one.

Additionally, VA is in the middle of three multi-billion dollar, multi-year technology system upgrades that impact almost every aspect of every-day functionality of the Department. The Integrated Financial and Acquisition Management System (iFAMS), also known as the Financial Management Business Transformation (FMBT) is planned to fully replace VA's financial systems. The Electronic Health Record Management (EHRM) is slated to replace VA's EHR across the entire VA enterprise. It is already planned to take more than a decade and requires significant coordination and cooperation with the Department of Defense. Finally, VA's antiquated procurement and logistics system is in the process of transitioning to DMLSS/Logicole system, which is also a process that requires coordination with the Department of Defense. It is essential that these upgrade processes stay on track for implementation and do not experience any delays as part of the transition of Administrations. Therefore, the Biden-Harris transition team needs to begin briefings on each of these as soon as possible so they can be ready to provide direction and continue these upgrade processes as soon as the incoming Administration takes over in January.

Lastly, VA has a Fiscal Year 2021 requested budget of over \$243 billion that is intended to provide disability compensation to over 5 million veterans and health care to more than 9.2 million enrollees in its health care system. That funding also accounts for the over 420,000 employees, 150 cemeteries, 50 benefits offices, and 1,750 sites of care the Department oversees. Waiting to discuss proposals and budgetary needs for FY 2022 in the middle of a COVID-19 pandemic puts at risk many of the services provided to veterans across the country and their families. Hard-working, non-partisan career officials in the Department should not be unduly blocked from sharing critical planning and budget information with the incoming administration, potentially preventing the appropriate resources for VA from being included in the new President's FY 2022 budget submission.

I expect an immediate reversal of GSA's current denial of the outcome of the 2020 election and harmful withholding of transition resources from the Biden-Harris transition teams. The lives and well-being of our country's veterans and their families depend on it.

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  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs