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# United States Senate

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January 12, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

I write today to request the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) deploy a Mobile Vet Center to provide outreach and support to underserved veterans in Eastern Montana, particularly Native American veterans and those living in frontier areas.

The Billings Vet Center provides essential readjustment counseling and mental health care to veterans, servicemembers, and their families, but the local Vet Center has a limited reach outside Billings and is hours away from many veterans in the region. During VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Shereef Elnahal's visit in December, we heard firsthand from veterans and local providers about the lack of access to in-person mental health care. They told us they had not seen the Mobile Vet Center in months, if ever. We both made a commitment to address this issue, and believe it requires urgent action.

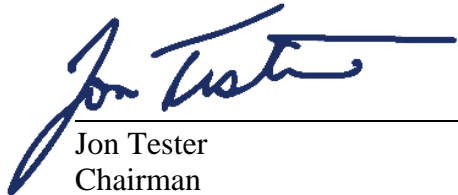
Deploying a Mobile Vet Center to communities around Eastern Montana could strengthen VA's relationship with Montana veterans, better inform them of their earned care and benefits, and strengthen suicide prevention efforts. VA should also consult with local tribes to see where a Mobile Vet Center could be helpful and most welcome. Vet Centers provide invaluable care and assistance to many veterans across Montana, and I request the Department expand this focus to reach our Eastern Montanan veterans.

Further, recent media reports highlight the need for additional funding to provide veteran mental health and suicide prevention services. I was proud to secure \$13.9 billion for veterans' mental health for fiscal year 2023 as part of the recent government funding omnibus bill (Public Law 117-328). I now need your assurance that VA will work expeditiously to utilize this funding to provide veterans – including those in rural areas or on tribal lands – with timely, accessible mental health care. This funding is also vital for the Department to quickly implement authorizing legislation I authored and successfully included in the omnibus. Those bipartisan bills, the *Post-9/11 Veterans' Mental Health Care Improvement Act*, the *Revising and Expediting Actions for the Crisis Hotline (REACH) for Veterans Act*, and the *American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans Mental Health Act*, will help improve VA's mental health care offerings and suicide prevention efforts.

The media reports also highlight the need for more aggressive outreach, particularly to Native American veterans, to increase awareness of the VA benefits and care to which they are entitled. My *American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans Mental Health Act* requires VA medical centers to consult with local tribes and deliver tailored outreach and culturally competent mental health care to Native veterans. I request the Department provide me with a detailed timeline for implementation of this law and compliance with these new requirements. In the meantime, VA should undertake a coordinated, collaborative effort to proactively share outreach materials and resources with Native veterans.

I appreciate your partnership in ensuring veterans in Eastern Montana, on tribal lands, in frontier areas, and across the country have access to the critical mental health care they need. Thank you for your consideration of this request and I look forward to continuing our work together to care for those who have so selflessly served our nation.

Sincerely,



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Jon Tester  
Chairman