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United States Senate

October 24, 2017

The Honorable David A. Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

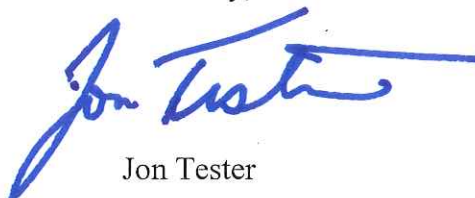
I appreciate your leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Today, I write to ask that you prioritize installing an on-site Director at the Fort Harrison Regional Office (RO).

As you know from your recent visit to Montana, the Fort Harrison RO oversees one of the largest and most rural states in our nation. The RO's current Director, however, is not even based in Montana. Instead, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) outsources Fort Harrison's top leadership position to the Salt Lake RO, which is roughly 480 miles from Helena. In addition to bringing on-the-ground leadership, an on-site Director would strengthen VBA's ties to Montana and enhance Fort Harrison's ability to engage Montana's veterans and its service organizations by convening educational events, such as clinics on the new appeals process. While farming out Fort Harrison's top leadership position, VBA has also outsourced to Salt Lake senior management billets and a number of services that are important to Montana's veterans, such as fleet vehicle oversight and facilities management. These jobs should be performed by Montanans in Montana. Montana's veterans service organizations strongly support the installation of an on-site Director at Fort Harrison.

According to VBA's Fiscal Year 2017 Resource Allocation Model, Fort Harrison has a ceiling of 97 Full Time Employees (FTEs). Had VBA not outsourced Fort Harrison's leadership and management billets to Salt Lake, however, that ceiling would surely be over 100 FTEs. There are currently 47 ROs with 100 or more FTEs, and all of them are led by an on-site Director. Therefore, I think it is high-time that Fort Harrison joins the ranks of those ROs with on-site leadership.

It is essential that Montana veterans secure the benefits and services they have earned. The presence and engagement of an on-site Director would benefit Montana's veterans and convey your commitment to honoring and serving them. I appreciate your serious consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester

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