

United States Senate

August 27, 2024

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We write today again disappointed by the clear failure in leadership at all levels of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to adhere to congressional intent, effectively implement the PACT Act, and be a responsible steward of taxpayer dollars. A failure that has culminated in 3.5 years of severe deterioration in your department's ability to adequately serve the American men and women across this country who selflessly stepped forward in service to the United States.

Your leadership of the VA has been characterized by a lack of accountability—made possible in part by the lack of sufficient oversight from the Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee—a willingness to ignore congressional intent. Under your leadership, veterans have witnessed improper bonuses being awarded to executives while their quality of care suffers, a \$15 billion combined budget shortfall which is larger than any shortfall ever experienced by any administration, and a blatant willingness by the VA to mislead the American public and Congress.

There are numerous examples of ignoring Congressional intent, but perhaps the most illustrative is the implementation of the PACT Act. In January 2023, the VA announced it would begin processing PACT Act benefits claims for all veterans and survivors, completely ignoring statutory requirements that benefits be phased in over an 8-year period. What resulted was a \$15 billion combined budget shortfall that you only recently notified Congress about. As mentioned previously, this shortfall is the largest for the VA under any administration and flies in the face of the FY25 budget request that this administration requested barely four months ago. Your active disregard for the law directly impacts veterans and threatens to put their promised benefits for exposure to toxic substances while serving their country benefits at risk.

Sadly, while the blame for this manufactured crisis rests at your feet, it is the American veteran—men and women united across generations by their willingness and desire to answer the call to service with an understanding that their government would be there for them when the time comes—who suffers most from your failures.

This pattern of brazen willingness to mislead the American people and Congress and circumvent federal law whenever it is politically expedient is unacceptable. The Department of Veterans Affairs is not a tool to be wielded for political benefit, but a mechanism to protect and care for the brave servicemembers of this great nation. Enough is enough, and our veterans deserve better. You and your leadership team should immediately reverse course and prioritize the well-being of our nation's veterans.

I look forward to your prompt response to this matter.

Sincerely,




Steve Daines
United States Senator

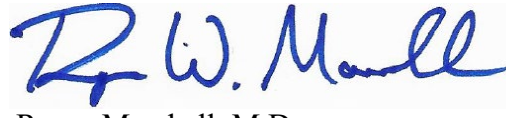


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