

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 6, 2018

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and  
Related Agencies  
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 125  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and  
Related Agencies  
Hart Senate Office Building, Room 125  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Schatz:

As you review appropriations for fiscal year 2019, we ask that you honor the commitments made under the Bipartisan Budget Agreement Act of 2018 to provide \$2 billion in fiscal year 2019 for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) infrastructure repairs and modernization. In February, Congress reached a comprehensive bipartisan budget agreement that included \$4 billion to be spent in fiscal year 2018 and 2019 for investments in VA infrastructure. We are deeply concerned by the VA's proposal to divert this funding to the Veterans Choice Program and ask that you ensure that the \$2 billion granted under the Bipartisan Budget Agreement for fiscal year 2019 be used for its original purpose. While we support providing additional healthcare options for veterans in the community, private sector programs should not be funded at the expense of the specialized care at VA.

Increased funding for VA medical facilities will make significant progress in reducing the nationwide backlog in VA construction and infrastructure work that has impacted veterans' access to critical medical and long-term care services. VA is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, yet many of its facilities are over 50 years old and are in desperate need of modernization. As VA facilities deteriorate, veterans are left without accessible care. It is not a choice when veterans are forced to seek care through the private sector because they cannot seek care safely within the VA.

Likewise, investing in VA infrastructure repairs and modernization will recruit talented medical professionals at a time when the VA is grappling with maintaining adequate staffing levels. Strong funding for infrastructure modernization will set VA facilities apart from their counterparts in the community and improve hiring and retention efforts. The importance of ensuring VA has high quality providers cannot be understated and Congress must pursue all solutions to bolstering the VA's recruitment efforts – including upgrading VA facilities to attract

top talent. Used wisely, federal funding for VA infrastructure could resolve a litany of challenges and must not be repurposed.


In fiscal year 2018, you supported the Bipartisan Budget Agreement Act and appropriated \$2 billion as the first down payment to improving VA infrastructure. Of the \$2 billion, \$1 billion was allocated for nonrecurring maintenance of VA medical facilities; \$425 million for minor construction; and \$575 million for grants for construction of State Extended Care Facilities. We applaud the Committee's action and urge you to continue to provide funding for deferred maintenance on crumbling hospitals and unfinished construction projects, as well as funding to address the approximately 70,000 identified code deficiencies at hospitals and clinics nationwide in fiscal year 2019.


Congress agreed to provide the VA with \$2 billion in fiscal year 2019 with the understanding that it will be used to rebuild and improve VA hospitals and clinics. The VA's proposal to repurpose this funding to the Veterans Choice Program not only disregards this intent, but it is another troubling example of the agency's history of poor financial management. It is important that Congress not enable VA to continue to cannibalize one aspect of its budget to pay for another. Our veterans deserve better than a VA that cannot invest in their future long term because they are constantly repurposing funding to address short sighted budget decisions.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you to ensure our veterans receive the best quality care possible.

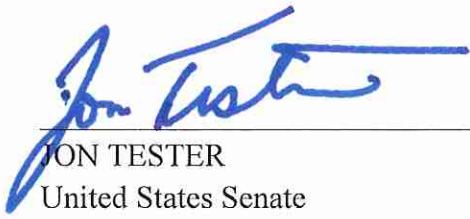
Sincerely,

  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate

  
SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senate

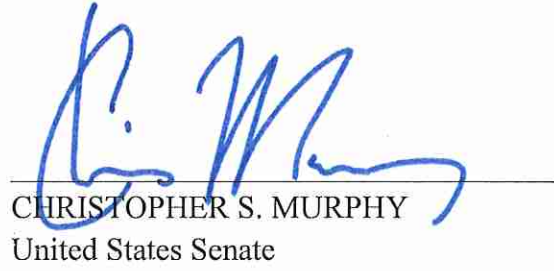
  
ELIZABETH WARREN  
United States Senate

  
MARK R. WARNER  
United States Senate



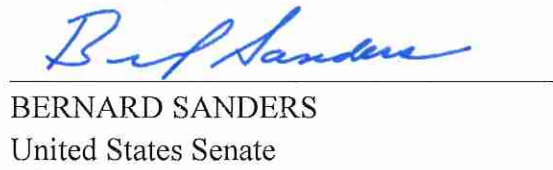
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JON TESTER  
United States Senate



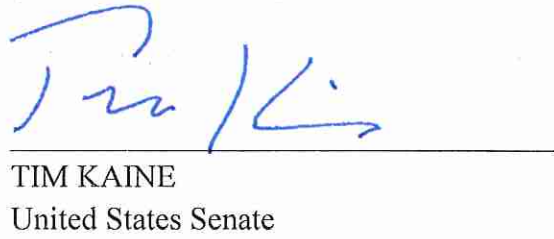
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CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senate



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BERNARD SANDERS  
United States Senate



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TIM KAINE  
United States Senate