

June 14, 2024

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

Dear Secretary McDonough,

We are writing today to inquire about media reports that indicate Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials are expected to eliminate a total of 10,000 frontline jobs that serve clinical needs for veteran health care. These 10,000 jobs include psychologists, clinical social workers, and others who have a direct impact on the care veterans receive each and every day at VA facilities across the country. If these reports are true, the fact that job cuts were made to frontline positions directly contradicts claims made by you and other agency leaders who have previously declared that such front-line position would be free from cuts. This would also be the latest in a long list of failures and your department that illustrate a VA in disarray and woefully unprepared or unwilling to adequately serve those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedoms.

Every year you appear before U.S. Congress and request record setting billions of dollars in funding increases, all while veterans continue to deal with increasing wait times for VA medical care and services—in some cases waiting over two weeks before they can even schedule mental health appointments. VA sources have even voiced frustration that primary care providers have repeatedly raised concerns that acute mental health interventions for our veterans is unavailable at times.

Too many people in Washington, including some of our colleagues in Congress with direct influence over policies impacting veterans, will make empty promises about fighting for veteran care and will use this report as an opportunity to call for more spending and more legislation that will only add to the bureaucratic nightmare at the VA. The reality is, it is the lack of proper oversight and the brazen willingness of the VA to violate congressional intent and prioritize issues that have zero impact on improving patient outcomes for veterans that has led to such disdain with the quality of VA care.

Nothing depicts the mismanagement of the VA under this Administration more than the fact that at the same time your agency is cutting front line jobs due to some “budgetary shortfall,” it is also discovered that you improperly awarded nearly \$11 million in bonuses to career executives who weren’t eligible to receive them. As this example and the numerous others from the last

United States Senate

three and a half years demonstrate, the Biden VA's priorities are clearly misplaced and the result has been poor care for veterans.

Thus, in the interest of providing clarity to the many veterans who demand answers as to why the VA is actively cutting frontline clinical jobs at a time where they are already unable to provide timely and quality care, we are requesting answers to the following questions:

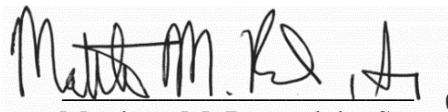
- Is it true you are cutting 10,000 frontline jobs that serve clinical needs for veteran health care?
- What strategic goals does the VA hope to achieve through this staffing reduction?
- What is the average time for hiring and onboarding Veterans Health Administration (VHA) clinical staff?
- How many tentative employment offers for VHA clinical staff have been rescinded in 2024?
- What is the average length of employment of clinical service new hires at the VA?
- What is the percentage of VHA employees who currently receive retention bonuses?
- What is the number of Behavioral Health Interdisciplinary Program (BHIP) model Full Time Employee Equivalent (FTEE) vacancies within Montana, and within VHA as a whole?
- What are the hiring and vacancy statistics of all VHA clinical positions for the past three years?
- What are the hiring and vacancy statistics of all VA Central Office, department-wide Senior Executive Service (SES), and VHA clerical positions for the past three years?
- What is the total dollar amount of yearly bonuses provided to all VA Central Office staff over the past three years, to include VBA?
- To-date, how much of the \$11 million in inappropriate bonuses have been recouped and what VHA account have those funds have been returned to?

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your prompt response.

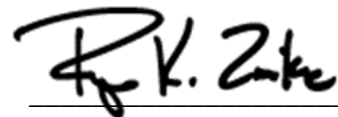
Sincerely,



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Matthew M. Rosendale, Sr.
Member of Congress



Ryan K. Zinke
Member of Congress