

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 25, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

We are deeply troubled that your freeze on the hiring of federal civilian employees will have a negative and disproportionate impact on our nation's veterans. As such, we urge you to take stock of this hiring freeze's effect on our nation's veterans and exempt the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as well as any veterans seeking federal employment from your Memorandum Regarding the Hiring Freeze.

While there can be no debate that the federal government, including VA, should be more efficient in its delivery of services to all Americans, a hiring freeze at VA will delay veterans' access to health care and resolution of their disability claims, which for many of our nation's heroes provides a sole source of income to them and their families. Our nation's veterans should not be made to sacrifice any more than they already have while you review federal hiring.


Have you considered how this hiring freeze will affect VA's ability to provide veterans with access to health care? For years, VA has faced chronic medical personnel shortages, particularly in rural areas. As a result of the hiring freeze, the Department's inability to hire clinicians and the administrative support teams to schedule appointments will have a direct impact on the number of veterans on waiting lists at facilities across the country. Further, this will have an impact on community providers, who will be forced to continue waiting for delayed payments without VA having the ability to hire employees to process payments on their claims. We urge you to re-evaluate this hiring freeze and take into account veterans who will face increased delays in accessing health care.

Have you considered how this hiring freeze will affect VA's ability to provide veterans with decisions on their appeals for disability compensation? More than 450,000 appeals are pending – that means that more than 450,000 veterans are waiting for the U.S. government to provide them with benefits earned while a disability was incurred while serving in our armed services. Our nation's veterans cannot afford an unnecessary wait to receive the benefits they have earned serving our country. We urge you to re-evaluate this hiring freeze and take into account the effect it will have on veterans who will have to wait longer for earned benefits -- whether it's disability, survivor or education benefits, or whether it's vocational rehabilitation or job training services.

Have you considered how this hiring freeze will impact those veterans who apply to federal jobs? Veterans comprise 31 percent of the federal workforce and most receive a well-earned hiring preference when they apply for federal jobs. An across-the-board freeze will hurt these veterans – many of whom are transitioning from military to civilian service, and many of whom are disabled. The negative impacts of this freeze will be felt across the country and disproportionately affect those men and women who have honorably served in our military.

Should you move forward with this hiring freeze, one issue that must not be overlooked is VA's little-known mission of providing support to national efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and man-made catastrophes. We urge you to classify VA's delivery of health care as a national security and public safety responsibility, as outlined in your Presidential Memorandum Regarding Hiring Freeze, and exempt it from this hiring freeze. To do otherwise is to jeopardize the national security and public safety of our nation.

Mr. President, this hiring freeze will have a dramatic impact on the quality of health care and benefits veterans receive. We urge you to reconsider.



Jon Tester
United States Senate



Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives



Brian Schatz
United States Senate



Mark Takano
United States House of Representatives



Patty Murray
United States Senate



Julia Brownley
United States House of Representatives




Bernard Sanders
United States Senate



Ann McLane Kuster
United States House of Representatives



Sherrod Brown
United States Senate



Beto O'Rourke
United States House of Representatives


Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senate


Kathleen Rice
United States House of Representatives


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate



J. Luis Correa
United States House of Representatives

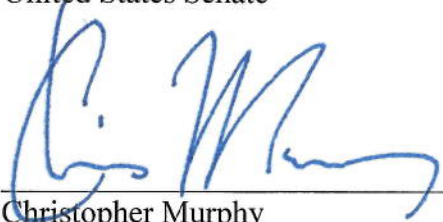

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senate


Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senate

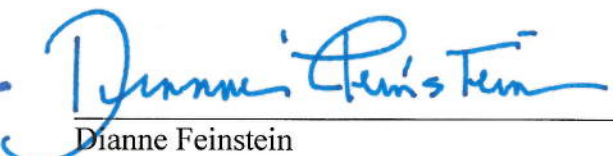

Jack Reed
United States Senate

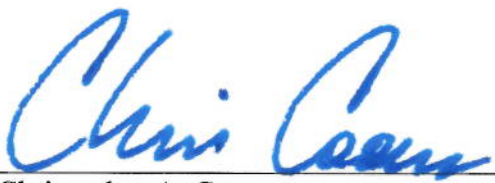

Tom Udall
United States Senate


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senate


Christopher Murphy
United States Senate


Maria Cantwell
United States Senate

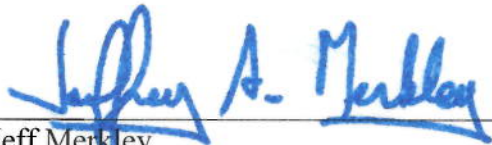

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senate



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senate



Jeff Merkley
United States Senate



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senate



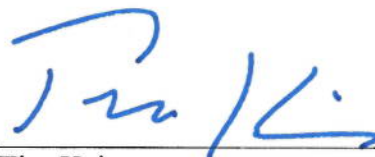
Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate



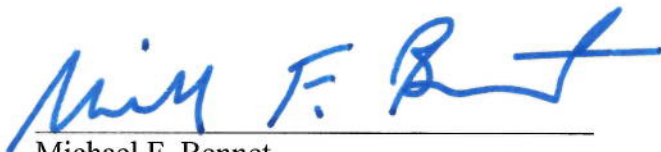
Al Franken
United States Senate



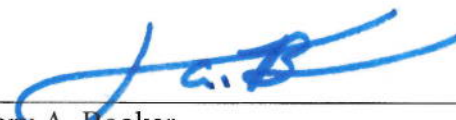
Charles E. Schumer
United States Senate



Tim Kaine
United States Senate



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senate



Cory A. Booker
United States Senate



Gary C. Peters
United States Senate



Claire McCaskill
United States Senate



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senate



Robert Menendez
United States Senate



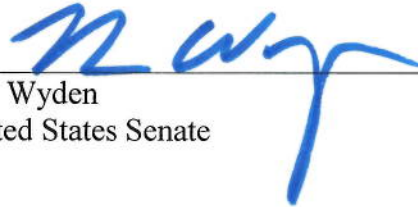
Mark R. Warner
United States Senate



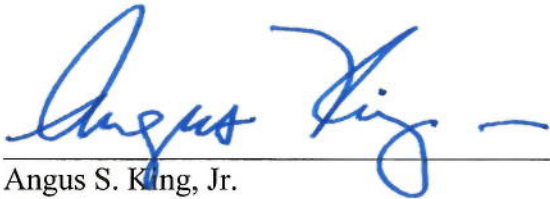
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate



Martin Heinrich
United States Senate



Ron Wyden
United States Senate



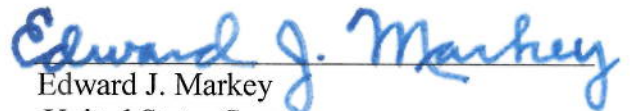
Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senate



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senate



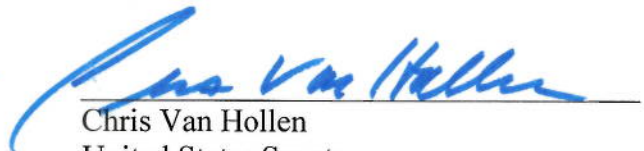
Bill Nelson
United States Senate




Edward J. Markey
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Jeanne Shaheen
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Chris Van Hollen
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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate



Benjamin L. Cardin
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Sheldon Whitehouse
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Heidi Heitkamp
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Kamala D. Harris
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Margaret Wood Hassan
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Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senate



Joe Donnelly
United States Senate



Joe Manchin III
United States Senate