

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 8, 2024

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

Secretary McDonough,

I write today with significant concern regarding the recent “Red Team” Executive Roundtable Report, which explores the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) community care health care spending, veteran access to community providers, and access strategies.

This report seems to solely advance the goals of finding creative ways to bring veterans back into the VA’s direct care system and protecting the VA’s bureaucracy instead of serving our nation’s veterans. Meanwhile, the VA is putting a “strategic pause” on hiring and creating confusion across the VISN’s, thereby impacting veteran healthcare.

For the last three years I have pressed the VA over increasingly questionable practices, such as limiting community care options, last minute appointment cancelations, and providing community care authorizations that expire before provider appointments can be conducted. This report substantiates my concerns that the VA has been pursuing efforts to reduce the utilization of the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP).

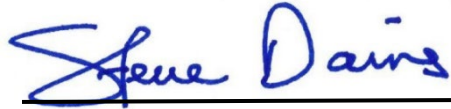
I have received reports on how the VA is inappropriately comparing available wait time data between community health care providers and VA health care facilities as a mechanism for limiting VCCP eligibility. In contrast, the Key Findings of the Red Team report argue that “Real time information about the timeliness and quality of community care is generally not available.” This discrepancy highlights my concern that the VA has been arbitrarily limiting veteran access to their community care network. This practice is unethical, against congressional intent of the VA MISSION Act of 2018, and diminishes veterans’ right to pursue community care options.

This report’s criticism of the popularity of community care reflects the VA’s mentality that the average veteran is incapable of making their own health care decisions. These findings are indicative of an effort to restructure VCCP and veteran community care access standards, instead of being the impartial fact finding mission that it should be. The VA’s eagerness to cast aside this country’s rural veterans in favor of protecting the VA bureaucracy is unacceptable.

This administration continually places the burden of reforms on the back of those who have faithfully served our nation. At the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing on the FY25 VA Budget on May 1, 2024, you stated that you had not yet seen the report, however, I’m sure it will be on your desk before long. I expect the VA to provide a timely response to my concerns and

detail how you intend to protect our veteran's access to the community health care options they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Daines". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Steve" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Daines".

Steve Daines
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thom Tillis". The signature is written in a cursive style, with "Thom" and "Tillis" clearly legible.

Thom Tillis
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chuck Grassley". The signature is written in a cursive style, with "Chuck" and "Grassley" clearly legible.

Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marsha Blackburn". The signature is written in a cursive style, with "Marsha" and "Blackburn" clearly legible.

Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator