

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 19, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

Last week I wrote a letter to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy regarding harmful operational changes that restricted mail movement and limited carriers' ability to make timely deliveries throughout the United States. These operational changes negatively impacted many veterans' receipt of prescriptions.

I have since learned that rather than urge the Postmaster to rescind the operational changes that are causing veterans harm, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has instead instituted a plan to work with at least one private sector company to deliver medications in Montana – scaling back its relationship with the United States Postal Service (USPS) and potentially leaving rural veterans without last-mile service. And while Postmaster General DeJoy yesterday noted he was reversing course on many of his planned operational changes, it remains to be seen what damage will need to be repaired to mitigate the Postmaster's recent decisions.

As the Ranking Member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, I have serious concerns about VA's plans to work with a private sector company rather than continue to partner with the USPS, which boasts 100,000 former servicemembers within its ranks, to deliver medications for veterans in Montana. As such, I request your timely response to the questions below so that I might discern how widespread this change is and how it will impact veterans and taxpayers moving forward.

1. What percentage of prescriptions for Montana veterans are delivered by the USPS? Other entities? How will that change moving forward?
2. My understanding is that 90 percent of the Consolidated Mail Outpatient Pharmacy (CMOP) packages are delivered by the USPS. What currently accounts for the other 10 percent? What is the cost breakdown between the two?
3. How will VA's reliance on the private sector change with a move toward non-USPS delivery services? In addition to Montana, which states and territories will see a shift from the USPS to private sector delivery?
4. How much will the move to private sector delivery cost VA over what the Agency pays to the USPS in a typical month?

5. How will private sector delivery serve rural areas? Will “last mile” deliveries be required to partner with VA? Or will some veterans no longer receive deliveries to their doorsteps?
6. Does VA plan to move non-prescription communication with veterans to the private sector rather than continue its relationship with the USPS? For example, decisions on claims for service-connection and other benefits.
7. How will Postmaster DeJoy’s decision today affect VA’s plans to use private sector delivery for prescriptions?
8. If VA continues to shift prescription deliveries to the private sector, what factors will the Agency consider before moving back to a relationship with the USPS?

Mr. Secretary, VA’s mail-order pharmacy program is extremely popular among veterans, with an “among the best” rating in customer satisfaction according to the J.D. Power U.S. Pharmacy Study. A large part of that success has been due to the dedication of the men and women of the USPS. I urge you to address any concerns you might have with the status of deliveries with Postmaster General DeJoy so that veterans and taxpayers might benefit from this cost-efficient and highly-rated partnership to deliver medications to veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs