

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 9, 2023

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I write to stress the importance of ensuring all eligible veterans registering an intent to file for Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act benefits by today's deadline have their applications honored as on-time, even if they encounter technical difficulties with Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) systems. I understand steps are being taken to address these issues. VA must now follow through with its plan to accept the applications as being on-time and notify all impacted veterans they have successfully met the deadline. It is critical that the men and women who have served our nation are able to access the health care and benefits they have earned.

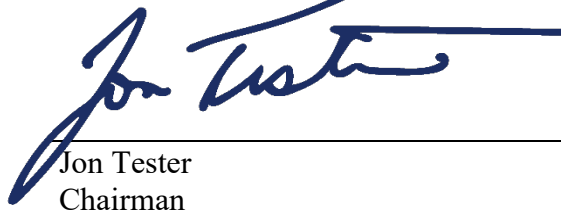
According to VA, veterans who received error messages when submitting their claims for PACT Act benefits will have their applications honored as meeting the August 9 due date for retroactive benefits and will receive communications from the Department assuring them of receipt of their intents to file. I am requesting that VA provide me with daily updates on its efforts to contact veterans to assure them of receipt of their intents to file and provide them with any necessary further information or required next steps. I also request VA provide me with an overview of what caused these technical difficulties and how VA will address this weakness in the system moving forward.

I understand veterans and their families are experiencing long wait times when they contact VA for PACT Act assistance by phone. I request VA do everything in its power to minimize these wait times, including authorizing operation of the call center outside its normal business hours and overtime for call center staff, today and as long as the call volume remains high, so questions can be answered as quickly as possible.

As the September 30 deadline for the one-year health care open enrollment period looms, I request VA revisit the systems and processes in place to receive applications for health care to ensure they are able to handle a significant surge resulting from the deadline. VA must ensure every veteran who is eligible to apply under the open enrollment authority is able to do so without problems. Continued, proactive outreach and engagement with all relevant veterans is critical.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue and I stand ready to assist with anything the Department needs to ensure veterans and their families are able to receive the benefits and health care promised under the PACT Act.

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
Chairman
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs