

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

B-234 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

February 5, 2021

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs
B234 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Takano:

I am writing regarding the budget reconciliation process, which would provide an additional \$17 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). I understand that the Veterans' Affairs Committee will need to report our proposal for that funding to the Budget Committee in accordance with its instructions by February 16th. I urge you to take a deliberative, collaborative, transparent approach to moving forward with that task.

As leaders of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, we share a desire to ensure that VA has every resource it requires to support veterans, caregivers, families, survivors, and employees. That is why we voted last year to provide VA with \$19.6 billion in emergency funding in the CARES Act to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and with a record \$243.3 billion base appropriation for fiscal year 2021. These are unprecedented amounts that clearly demonstrate Congress' continued bipartisan commitment to VA's sacred mission. If VA demonstrates a need above that, I know we would both commit to meeting that need. However, VA assured the Committee multiple times last Congress that the Department did not require additional resources beyond those that had already been approved. Furthermore, VA informed us just last week that approximately \$10.9 billion in CARES Act funding remains unobligated and available for use. Needless to say, there has been no justification to-date to support the Biden's Administration's request for an additional \$17 billion in the reconciliation package. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Ranking Member Moran and I wrote to the Acting VA Secretary yesterday requesting that information. We are his awaiting response. In the absence of one, we have no information as to how that amount was determined; why the Administration believes it is needed; what it will be used for; or how veterans will benefit from it. To move forward with considering this request on a fast-track in light of that would be reckless and irresponsible. It also cannot be ignored that the basic tenets of the Congressional Budget Act and budget reconciliation precedent limit spending to mandatory programs. Even if VA does identify additional needs for COVID-19 relief, the process being employed here seems to restrict our options to meet those needs.

Regardless, we owe it to the veterans we are here to serve and to the American people whose hard-earned money will pay for this proposal to carefully consider all aspects of it. We also owe it to them to do so publicly so that they can weigh its merits for themselves. Accordingly, I urge you to proceed via regular order beginning with an oversight hearing where Administration officials can offer testimony and respond to questions from Committee Members.

The Honorable Mark Takano

February 5, 2021

Page 2

That must be followed by a markup where Committee Members are afforded the opportunity to offer substantive amendments and engage in open debate before casting their votes – in many, cases, their very first votes in our Committee – on such a consequential decision.

Complicating this work is the fact that our Committee has yet to organize for the 117th Congress. As you know, there are several critical outstanding items that we must resolve prior to holding our respective caucus organizational meetings and, following those, our Committee-wide organizational meeting. Each of those meetings requires that Members be provided with 3 days advance notice. There are only 11 calendar days between now and February 16th. I fail to see how we could feasibly organize, thoroughly consider the need for additional funding of this magnitude, and markup this proposal in that time. That said, I also fail to see how veterans and taxpayers would be well-served by rushing through billions of additional dollars in federal spending without due deliberation. Therefore, I stand ready to assist you in accomplishing the totality of our work in the time available to us.

Sincerely,



Mike Bost
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

MB/sg