

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

February 24, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue Northwest
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

Thank you for fulfilling your commitment to return to South Dakota to visit the Hot Springs VA medical center. Unfortunately, we were discouraged to learn that a draft itinerary of your upcoming visit fails to allot time for interaction with members of the community, our veterans, and other stakeholders.


In our discussions with you dating back to November of 2018, we have repeatedly stressed the importance of meeting with the veterans who would be personally affected by the VA's realignment plan. We most recently raised this matter in our discussions prior to your October 2019 visit to our state. Failure to hold a discussion about the Hot Springs campus with them will forgo an opportunity to hear firsthand from veterans about long-held concerns with the VA's Hot Springs plan. Moreover, it will confirm to veterans and the community that a reduction in services at the Hot Springs VA has been a pre-determined outcome throughout this process, regardless of stakeholder input. We are confident that the long-sought visit to the historic campus will be most productive if it includes meaningful engagement with the veteran community.

As the fourth VA Secretary to oversee this matter, we believe you have a real opportunity to revisit the VA's record of decision and move forward in a collaborative way, but this will require direct dialogue. While we understand you set the trip agenda, we would strongly advise you to include a roundtable discussion with local stakeholders during your visit. We believe this should be a top priority.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,


JOHN THUNE
United States Senator


M. MICHAEL ROUNDS
United States Senator


DUSTY JOHNSON
Member of Congress