

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

December 17, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

Thank you for your continued work to address the significant challenges facing America's veterans and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as you seek to improve access to quality care and increase VA accountability. We hope your October 3, 2019, visit to the Fort Meade VA medical center was productive and informative with respect to the unique challenges veterans in our region of the country face concerning access to care. We especially appreciate your attention to the needs of rural and Native American veterans, including housing.

As you look ahead to your 2020 schedule, we request that you expand upon this experience and work to address the long-standing matters at the Hot Springs VA. As you know, the Hot Springs VA is a priority for veterans in western South Dakota and neighboring states. Unfortunately, the campus has endured a persistent cloud of uncertainty for nearly a decade, which has affected employee recruitment and retention, reduced urgent care hours, required the use of short-term contractors. In November 2018, the South Dakota congressional delegation wrote to request that you visit Hot Springs to meet with veterans and VA employees that would be personally affected by the VA's realignment plan, as well as see firsthand the quality care and healing environment in "the Veterans Town." For example, the Hot Springs VA has an outstanding Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program that holds promising potential for expanded compensated work therapy programs and recreational and retreat opportunities for veterans receiving treatment for PTSD and substance abuse.

As the fourth VA Secretary to oversee this matter, we believe you have a real opportunity to revisit the VA's record of decision, the disputed data behind it, and move forward in a collaborative way, but this will require direct dialogue.

We know the demands of your schedule are many, which is why we appreciated your September 27, 2019, statement of your intent to visit Hot Springs months after your travel to Fort Meade. We look forward to working with you to foster a productive discussion with the veteran stakeholders in Hot Springs.

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

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE  
United States Senator



M. MICHAEL ROUNDS  
United States Senator



DUSTY JOHNSON  
Member of Congress

CC: South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem