



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

December 8, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Speaker: 

I am writing to share my concerns about the impacts a Continuing Resolution (CR) would have on the Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors that Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) serves, and to urge you to adopt the third budget category for Veteran health care proposed in the FY 2023 President's Budget.

Veterans deserve a VA that serves them as well as they have served our country, and everyone at VA is determined to fulfill that mission. Over the past 2 years, VA delivered more care and benefits to more Veterans than ever before in our Nation's history – and we plan to continue that trend in FY 2023. However, we cannot provide Veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors with the world-class care and benefits they earned without a full year appropriation.

Furthermore, we need Congress to act to provide full funding for the implementation of the "Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022" (the PACT Act). This includes providing sufficient funding within the new Toxic Exposure Fund to meet the requirements of the PACT Act. The Toxic Exposure Fund, as codified at 38 U.S.C. § 324, was specifically designed to ensure that Congress did not need to fund the costs of treating Veterans exposed to environmental hazards, the administration of benefits for those Veterans and conducting research on environmental hazards exposure through regular appropriations.

A CR through the rest of the fiscal year would cause an estimated \$10.7 billion shortfall for VA. This would severely limit VA's ability to implement the PACT Act and deliver the promised health care and benefits for toxic-exposed Veterans and their survivors. The shortfall of \$8.7 billion in the Veterans Health Administration would limit access to care for Veterans and impair plans to hire thousands of additional health care professionals to meet that demand. The reduction in funding to the Veterans Benefits Administration (\$892 million) and to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (\$57 million) would cause the backlog of claims and appeals to grow by hundreds of thousands, meaning Veterans would not receive the benefits they earned. A CR would reduce funding for the National Cemetery Administration by \$36 million, limiting VA's ability to maintain existing cemeteries and open new cemeteries for Veterans. The Office of Information & Technology would experience an \$675M shortfall that would significantly

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impact their ability execute PACT Act requirements to include providing newly hired staff with the equipment to do their work and provisioning newly leased/built spaces with the technology required to operate. In addition, it would delay construction projects totaling \$73 million.

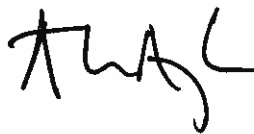
VA is the primary department that serves Veterans, but it is not the only one. Veterans depend on the services of the Departments of Labor, Education, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, and many other agencies. To support Veterans, these agencies also need an appropriate level of funding, and that can only be achieved with fair, full-year appropriations for all Federal agencies.

I urge Congress to act swiftly to provide VA a full FY 2023 appropriation so that we can carry out our mission. I strongly encourage you to support the third budget category for Veteran health care – separate from defense and non-defense budget categories – to cement our Nation's commitment to Veterans without trading off against other necessary non-defense investments, and without other priorities forcing tradeoffs for Veterans. I also remind you of the commitments you made to Veterans when you enacted the PACT Act and urge you to fulfill those commitments by fully funding the Toxic Exposures Fund.

Similar letters have been sent to Congressional leaders and leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

Thank you for your continued support of VA, and more importantly, of the Nation's Veterans, their family members, caregivers, and survivors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DMcDonough', written in a cursive, stylized script.

Denis McDonough