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March 15, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

As you know, the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is impacting all sectors of society. I write to express my concern for the health of our nation's veterans, the dedicated staff who care for them, and seek more information regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) preparation to counter this global health crisis. I also write to express my willingness to work with you to help ensure that the best quality of care is offered to our veterans and to support those who care for them.

As such, please provide a prompt response to the following questions regarding the status of VA's preparedness, coordination efforts, and what additional resources the VA may require to combat COVID-19.

1. Who is coordinating the VA's response to COVID-19?
2. Has the VA implemented a coordinated plan that designates someone in each Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) to be responsible for Covid-19 response and oversight within each VISN?
 - a. If so, who has been designated in VISN 1?
 - b. If not, is such an action planned?
3. What is the status of the VA's coordination with state and local governments?
 - a. Who (if anyone) has been designated to oversee this effort in VISN 1?
4. Does the VA have adequate medical supplies – in particular ventilators and protective masks – to counter a significant uptick in VA patients in need of care related to COVID-19?
5. What training has VA staff undergone with regard to pre-screening veterans who believe they may have COVID-19?

6. As has been widely reported that COVID-19 is particularly deadly to the elderly and those with co-morbidities, what steps have been taken to enhance the safety of the most vulnerable veterans?
7. What has been done to communicate best practices and pass timely information to State Veterans Homes?
 - a. How frequently is the VA in contact with the Rhode Island Veterans Home in Bristol, Rhode Island, related to COVID-19?
8. What engagement has the VA had with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to pass relevant health information and reduce the risk of spread of misinformation?
9. Has the VA engaged with other executive branch agencies such as the Department of Defense and Department of Health and Human Services to better coordinate care and ensure consistent and accurate messaging related to COVID-19?
10. Please explain what impact the President's declaration of a national emergency will have on the VA's operations?
 - a. What discussions have occurred and what planning has VA undertaken to determine if it is capable of deploying health care providers given current staff vacancies?
11. What additional resources does the VA require to combat COVID-19?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Again, I stand ready to work with you to help protect our veterans and those who provide care for them.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator