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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

September 17, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Wilkie:

I write today in response to your letter dated September 13, 2019 and to urge you again to reconsider the decision that would prohibit Congressional offices from using office space at Veterans Health Administration (VA) facilities. The sudden decision to evict Members of Congress from VA facilities was very surprising considering none of our Congressional offices—nor the veterans served by the offices—were consulted by the VA prior to this decision.

Moreover, as you know, these offices were first put into place under the leadership of President Donald Trump, who has made unparalleled progress for veterans during his first term in office. Allowing Members of Congress to meet with constituents at VA facilities has improved veteran access to their Congressional representatives, helping thousands of veterans without sacrificing any medical space at the facilities. These offices are a prime example of President Trump's commitment to helping veterans and his dedication to increasing accountability and transparency. The termination of these offices will hurt veterans and serves only to undermine the significant legacy of the Trump Administration opening up the VA to increased accountability after substantial failings during President Obama's tenure.

Specific to the community that I represent in Congress, the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center is a 1.7 million square foot facility, including 811,000 square feet in the main hospital. If the 100 square foot converted storage closet that our office currently occupies is needed for another use, will you please direct the hospital's leadership to locate a different 100 square foot space that we may utilize to help veterans? Surely, there is a conference room that we could use while it is empty or another storage closet that could be cleaned out.

To this end, I would like to invite you again to visit our office in hopes that we may find a suitable arrangement to keep this office operational. Moreover, in your letter, you suggested that I hold a "town hall on the premises to further constituent outreach." Therefore, I would like to invite you to host a joint town hall with me prior to the end of the year at the West Palm Beach VA so that we can both hear directly from the veterans that we wish to serve.

The bottom line is that if you want to fix a problem, you have to be present for it. While you may believe that effective oversight can be conducted from Washington, D.C. (as stated in your letter),

I believe that the history of crisis within various VA medical centers proves otherwise. That is why I opened the office in the first place, and I encouraged my fellow Members of Congress to do the same. Far too often, decision makers in Washington, D.C. ignore problems because they refuse to spend the time actually experiencing the issues themselves. I refuse to fall into that trap, and so I hope you will join me in upholding President Trump's commitment to improving transparency and accountability for our veterans by reversing your decision.

Sincerely,



Brian Mast
Member of Congress

cc:

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500