

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 3, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Secretary McDonough:

Thank you for your steadfast leadership during this difficult and unpredictable time. We write to you today to urge the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to develop a comprehensive plan to connect veterans of the war in Afghanistan and the Global War on Terrorism to essential VA benefits and services as soon as possible.

These past few weeks have been difficult ones for our country, particularly for the servicemembers and veterans who served in Afghanistan. The disastrous withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan has seen the country fall into the hands of the Taliban, and has resulted in a major crisis that has left American citizens stranded and the lives of our Afghan allies threatened. More than two million veterans served during the Global War on Terrorism, including more than 800,000 in Afghanistan. As Members of Congress, our top priority must be to ensure our veterans and their families receive the benefits, treatment and services they have rightfully earned and desperately need in light of the unfolding situation in Afghanistan. Programs administered by the VA, like Solid Start, provide an important link between newly separated veterans and the resources the VA can provide, connecting with each veteran through a one-on-one phone call three times within the first year after separation. These calls are a critical opportunity for veterans to learn about resources they may have overlooked, get connected to new resources, and receive support for immediate concerns, such as a mental health crisis.

In light of the current situation, the Department must accelerate similar efforts to provide all available resources to veterans of the Global War on Terrorism. Specifically, we recommend the creation of a comprehensive plan to connect these veterans to essential VA benefits and services, including suicide prevention/mental health programs. As you know, the 2020 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report found that it is tragically the youngest group of veterans, post-9/11 veterans aged 18 to 34, that have the highest rate of suicide. It is vital that the VA proactively and immediately connect with these at-risk veterans.

Every veteran, particularly those who have served in Afghanistan, has endured tremendous hardship and great sacrifice over the course of their service. Given the seriousness of the ongoing situation, we urge the Department to develop a comprehensive plan to accelerate outreach to our Global War on Terrorism and Afghanistan veterans. The freedom and rights we enjoy are not free but are paid for by the service and sacrifice of our courageous servicemembers and veterans. We are forever indebted to the brave men and women who have sacrificed to defend our nation and we must remain committed to fighting for them.

Sincerely,



David P. Joyce
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress



Troy Balderson
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



Claudia Tenney
Member of Congress



Andrew R. Garbarino
Member of Congress



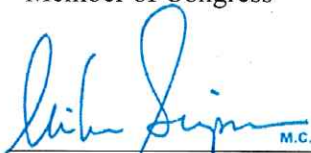
Mike Johnson
Member of Congress



Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



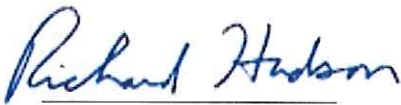
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Mike Simpson
Member of Congress



Anthony Gonzalez
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Richard Hudson
Member of Congress



Vern Buchanan
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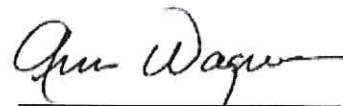
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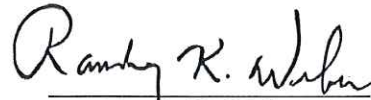


Adrian Smith
Member of Congress

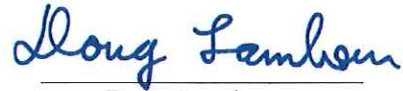


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