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HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND WATER
DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES



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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0549

February 14, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

Congratulations on your confirmation as Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I look forward to working with you in the years to come.

I represent California's 49th Congressional District, home to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and a large veteran community. Over the past six years, I served as the lead Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, where I focused on working across the aisle to ensure our veterans never go homeless, jobless, or hungry. My bipartisan work in Congress to support our veterans has been some of the most rewarding of my life. My grandfather served as a gunner with the 867th Bomb Squadron of the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II, and I think about him every day as I work to serve our troops, veterans, and their loved ones.

I was recently appointed to the House Appropriations Committee, where I plan to continue fighting for our nation's veterans on the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Subcommittee. In this new capacity, I look forward to developing a partnership with you to ensure VA has all the resources it needs to serve veterans and their families.

I appreciated VA's announcement that "essential positions that provide health care and other vital services to Veterans and VA beneficiaries"¹ would be exempt from the federal hiring freeze. However, I am concerned that the exemptions do not include the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), HUD-VASH case workers, and other essential VA employees. These employees help ensure that veterans have access to education, housing, and their disability payments. We must allow VA to hire the employees it needs to ensure there is no delay in benefits, care, or services.

¹ VA, <https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-declares-hiring-freeze-exemptions/>

I was troubled to hear yesterday that the Department had dismissed over 1,000 probationary employees. While I appreciate your assurances that this move will not negatively impact VA health care, benefits, or beneficiaries, I have also seen reports that these employees included at least one employee at the Veterans Crisis Line.² I ask that by March 1, 2025, you provide a detailed accounting of all the dismissed employees, their roles at the agency, and the positions now left vacant.

I was also deeply concerned to see that the now-rescinded Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memo included a document requiring agencies to report on around 2,600 programs, including service-connected disability benefits, Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance, essential vocational rehabilitation for disabled veterans such as the Veterans Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program, and homelessness prevention programs such as the Supportive services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program and the VA Homeless Providers` Grant and Per Diem Program.³

As a former Member of Congress, you understand the constitutional role of Congress's power of the purse. I respect the need for greater government efficiency, but these programs have proven time and again to provide indispensable services to our nation's heroes. I call on you to commit to protecting these essential government services from funding cuts.

I look forward to working with you to ensure our veterans receive the highest quality care and benefits they have earned. I want to share my concern about any effort that could reduce VA's capacity, potentially shifting veterans into private health care plans instead of strengthening the services they rely on. I believe we must prioritize expanding and improving VA care to best serve those who have sacrificed for our country. I appreciate the opportunity to collaborate on this important mission.

Thank you again for your dedication to veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Levin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

² Military Times, <https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2025/02/14/va-dismisses-over-1000-employees-as-part-of-probationary-worker-purge/>

³ NY Times, <https://static01.nyt.com/newsgraphics/documenttools/efb74532cbcf3060/fca0687f-full.pdf>