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WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Honorable David Shulkin, M.D.
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

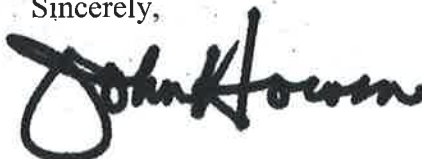
It is imperative that we develop and advocate for public policies to improve care and the quality of life for our nation's veterans. I appreciated having the opportunity to discuss veteran's issues with you last week, and I was encouraged by your recognition of the importance of providing veterans access to non-Veterans Administration (VA) extended care services. Now that you have been confirmed, I urge you to take action to improve veterans access to extended care by promulgating a new regulation to provide VA provider agreements for extended care providers.

In North Dakota, VA Fargo has contracts with only 14 of the 80 nursing homes throughout the state due to the burdensome and onerous VA contracting requirements. More of these homes would participate if we had VA provider agreements in place. Federal contracts come with extensive reporting requirements to the Department of Labor, which have deterred providers from VA participation. By eliminating these extensive requirements through the use of provider agreements, the VA can ensure veterans, in both rural and urban areas, have access to quality health care nearer to their families and friends. It is anticipated that when the VA provider agreement final rule is in place, the number of providers serving veterans will increase in most markets, expanding the options among veterans for nursing center care.

VA provider agreements for extended care will not only improve veterans access to care, but it will bring the VA's treatment of these facilities in line with long-standing policy under Medicare (Parts A and B) and Medicaid, where providers are not considered to be federal contractors. As employers and Medicare and Medicaid providers, nursing homes are already required to comply with a variety of employment discrimination laws and regulations. Adding additional regulations on top of this is simply inefficient, redundant and takes staff time away from these veterans at the bedside.

I believe that the VA can implement provider agreements through the regulatory process, and I urge you to do so using your existing authority. Increasing the opportunity for veterans to obtain non-VA extended care services, including nursing home care, from local providers that furnish vital and often life-sustaining medical services, is a goal we both share. I look forward to your response on how we can use VA provider agreements to expand veterans access to extended care services.

Sincerely,



United States Senator John Hoeven