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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515-6015

July 18, 2018

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The Honorable Mike Enzi  
Chairman  
Committee on the Budget  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Steve Womack  
Chairman  
Committee on the Budget  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Enzi and Womack:

I write in response to your July 16, 2018 letter informing me of your opposition to adjusting budget caps to account for costs associated with the Veteran's Affairs (VA) Choice program, which was transferred to the discretionary side of the budget under the VA MISSION Act.

In your letter, you urged the Appropriations Committees to "remain steadfast to the principles of good government and to prioritize funding for the programs authorized in the VA MISSION Act." This begs belief, because the MISSION Act is an excellent example of bad government — providing funding for this program through May 2019 and leaving the balance unaddressed. To cover the shortfall, the Appropriations Committee must provide an additional \$1.6 billion in FY 2019, an additional \$8.6 billion in FY 2020, and an additional \$9.5 billion in FY 2021.

You further state that any additional funding for the VA MISSION Act should be addressed within the recently increased nondefense discretionary spending limits. Unfortunately, these costs were not accounted for when we negotiated the budget caps in the bipartisan budget deal, so the Appropriations Committees are unable to address the shortfall within the 302(b) allocation without cutting funding for other vital domestic programs, including other veteran's services.

Moreover, you state that this effort to increase the caps started immediately after passage of the VA MISSION Act. This is incorrect. As you may recall, the funding shortfall was identified when the bill was being considered by the House Veterans Affairs Committee. In fact, Ranking Member Walz offered an amendment to address the funding shortfall issue, but his

efforts were rejected on a party-line vote. In response to the bill being grossly underfunded, I joined Ranking Member Walz in voting against the MISSION Act.

I remain puzzled as to why you supported a \$52 billion bill that did not include a dedicated source of funding and required a waiver of PAYGO rules, but now oppose a practical legislative fix to ensure that the VA MISSION Act does not become an unfunded mandate or cannibalize other vital federal resources.

I would also be remiss if I did not correct another inaccuracy in your letter. You state that the House rejected efforts to increase the caps, but your recollection of events is incorrect. During House consideration of H.R. 5895, the Energy and Water, Legislative Branch and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019, House Republican leadership blocked consideration of an amendment I authored to fix the VA MISSION Act shortfall. It is disingenuous, at the very least, to say the House rejected a solution when Republicans did not even allow a debate on the issue.

Finally, your letter states that “Federal spending is a reflection of our priorities as a nation.” That is true, which is why Republican Leadership, and President Trump, should have prioritized fully funding the VA MISSION Act before it was signed into law. Instead, Republicans chose to ignore the well-being of our veterans to play political budget games. If I have to choose between standing with you or the 33 Veterans’ Service Organizations, representing millions of veterans, service members, and their families, who support this fix, I will stand firmly with our veterans.

Sincerely,



Nita M. Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee of Appropriations

cc: The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable John Yarmuth  
Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget  
U.S. House of Representatives

Members of the Conference Committee on H.R. 5895,  
The Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction  
And Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019