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The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

I write to inquire about your decision to continue pursuing internal upgrades to the Department of Veterans' Affairs medical scheduling software program. I am extremely concerned that this means the VA will now be juggling four duplicative scheduling programs all at once, and could negatively impact veterans' care. I request you explain the rationale behind the decision and include the metrics used that indicate this is the most effective scheduling method for veterans.

As you may know, your decision to continue the VistA Scheduling Enhancements (VSE) program means that it now joins the Medical Appointment Scheduling System (MASS) pilot program - which was reinstated last month - and the Veteran Appointment Request self-scheduling (VAR) program. All three of these will be joined shortly by an internet scheduling pilot program mandated by the Faster Care for Veterans Act of 2016 (PL114-286).

In addition to being duplicative, the decision to continue VSE is contrary to comments you made to me personally during our pre-confirmation meeting. In our meeting last month, you stressed the critical need to improve the technological capabilities of the VA, specifically by contracting with commercial companies. You doubled down on this point during your confirmation hearing when you stated "I don't even know how they do their jobs," when referencing the current scheduling methods and programs at the VA.

I fear the VA is going against best practices found in the private sector, wasting taxpayer dollars and creating duplicative, confusing programs for patients simply trying to schedule a doctor's appointment. As we continue to see veterans' access to care impacted by scheduling failures at the VA, it is my hope that your decision does not exacerbate the problem. As a United States Senator, and as a veteran, it is my duty to ensure our nation honors the commitments we have made to those who have served.

I respectfully request you explain the rationale behind the decision to continue the VSE system, including what metrics were used that indicate this is the most effective scheduling method. In addition, I ask that you describe how you plan to measure the success and failure of all four programs now used for scheduling at the VA, and that you share that data with Congress once it is collected.

I look forward to your response and continuing to work with you to ensure we are delivering the best results for those who have selflessly served our nation.

Sincerely,


Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

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