

September 17, 2025

Dear Secretary Collins,

Thank you for your leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and dedicated service to America's veterans. Since President Trump's inauguration, the VA has returned to its core mission: supporting our nation's veterans rather than pursuing politics and headlines. Your commitment to putting veterans first has reverberated within the Department, restoring Americans' trust in the VA and its programs.

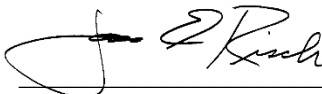
Nowhere is this more evident than in the VA's rapid improvement in disability claim processing. Under your stewardship, the VA has processed a record number of claims this year, reducing the backlog you inherited by 37 percent. This is no small feat, and I commend you for ensuring our nation's veterans can access the care they rightfully earned through their honorable service to our country.

This progress is especially impressive given the significant strain placed on the VA's claim processing infrastructure by recent policy changes. As you know, veterans suffering from newly established presumptive conditions should have them automatically recognized as service-connected. Yet, under the previous administration, many Idaho veterans suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, emphysema, and other presumptive conditions were required to undergo additional burdensome testing, and, in some cases, their disability claims were outright denied. These brave men and women answered the call to serve and should never be unjustly refused our support.

I appreciate your efforts to turn the page on the VA's past shortcomings, and I am confident that under your leadership the VA will rise to meet modern challenges. Claims processors must receive clear and consistent training to ensure presumptive conditions are properly recognized and that veterans do not have to contend with bureaucracy to access their earned benefits.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen the VA and ensure the federal government honors its sacred commitment to the men and women who have protected our freedoms, Constitution, and way of life.

Sincerely,



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James E. Risch  
United States Senator