

Text	Facts
<p>JON TESTER: Washington's a mess but that's not stopping me from getting bills to help Montana signed into law by President Trump.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 13 BILLS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER HAS HAD 13 BILLS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: "Tester Sends 13th Bill To Trump's Desk For Signature." [Missoula Current, 2/12/18]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GAO Access And Oversight Act. [S. 17, Cosponsors, Library of Congress, 1/3/17; Public Law 115-3, H.R. 72, 1/31/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll Call: Jon Tester And Republican Senator Ben Sasse "Originally Authored" The GAO Access And Oversight Act. [Roll Call, 1/17/17] 2. Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act. [S. 544, Library of Congress, 3/7/17; Public Law 115-26, 4/19/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEADLINE: "Trump Signs Tester's Bill To Improve Veterans Choice Program: Bipartisan Measure Cuts Red Tape For Vets Seeking Health Care Closer To Home." [Flathead Beacon, 4/19/17] 3. VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act. [Cosponsors, S. 1094, Library of Congress, 5/11/17; Public Law 115-41, 6/23/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEADLINE: "Trump Signs Tester's Bill Making It Easier To Fire VA Employees." [Missoula Current, 6/23/17] 4. VA Choice and Quality Employment Act. [Public Law 115-46, 8/12/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New York Times: Jon Tester "Led The Negotiations" On The Successful Veterans Choice Emergency Funding Deal. [New York Times, 7/27/17] 5. Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act. [Cosponsors, S. 1598, Library of Congress, 7/20/17; Public Law 115-48, H.R. 3218, 8/16/17] 6. Veterans Appeals Improvement And Modernization Act. [Cosponsors, S. 1024, Library of Congress, 5/3/17; Public Law 115-55, H.R. 2288, 8/23/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEADLINE: "President Signs Tester's Bill To Reform VA Disability Appeals." [KECI, 8/23/17] 7. VA Expiring Authorities Act. [Public Law 115-62, H.R. 3819, 9/29/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEADLINE: "Isakson Applauds House Passage of 'VA Authorization Act 2017' Bipartisan Isakson-Roe-Tester-Walz Legislation Continues Critical Veteran Programs, Services, Benefits." [Majority News Release, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, 9/25/17] 8. Veterans' Compensation Cost-Of-Living Adjustment Act. [Cosponsors, S. 784, Library of Congress, 3/30/17; Public Law 115-75, H.R. 1329, 11/2/17] 9. Gary Deloney and John Olsen Toxic Exposure Declassification Act. [Cosponsors, S. 726, Library of Congress, 3/27/17; Sec. 737, Public Law 115-91, H.R. 2810, 12/12/17] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEADLINE: "Bill Aimed To Help Billings Veterans' Struggles With VA Signed Into Law." [KTVQ, 12/12/17] 10. AFG and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act. [Cosponsors, S. 829, Library of Congress, 4/5/17; Public Law 115-98, H.R. 4661, 1/3/18]

	<p>11. Alex Diekmann Peak Designation Act. [Cosponsors, S. 117, Library of Congress, 1/12/17; Public Law 115-122, 1/31/18]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEADLINE: “President Signs Bill For Alex Diekmann Peak.” [Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 2/2/18] <p>12. Honoring Hometown Heroes Act. [S. 1108, Library of Congress, 5/11/17; Public Law 115-123, H.R. 1892, 2/9/18]</p> <p>13. Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability Act. [Cosponsors, S. 96, Library of Congress, 1/11/17; Public Law 115-129, 2/26/18]</p>
<p>TESTER: One. Reducing government waste, fraud and abuse.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 1 REDUCE WASTE, FRAUD AND ABUSE</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: H.R. 72 GAO Access And Oversight Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-3, 1/31/17</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER AUTHORED AND VOTED FOR BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO HELP TAXPAYER WATCHDOGS EXPOSE FEDERAL WASTE AND ABUSE</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “The Second Bill President Trump Signed Strengthens The Government Accountability Office’s Oversight Powers.” [GovTrack Insider, 3/1/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Congress Tackles Cabinet Confirmations, Expands Watchdog Powers.” [NextGov, 1/20/17]</p> <p><u>Roll Call: Jon Tester “Originally Authored” And Voted For The GAO Access And Oversight Act, Signed Into Law By President Trump.</u> On January 3, 2017, Jon Tester was an original cosponsor of S. 17. <u>Roll Call</u> reported: “Although all eyes will be on the committee hearing rooms, the Senate will kick off the week with a 4:45 p.m. vote on the GAO Access and Oversight Act of 2017. Nebraska Republican Sen. Ben Sasse and Montana Democratic Sen. Jon Tester originally authored the legislation, which passed the House on Jan. 4. The bill would allow the Government Accountability Office to access federal records and audit programs, including giving the GAO standing in court to require agencies to provide records.” [Roll Call, 1/17/17; S. 17, Cosponsors, Library of Congress, 1/3/17; Public Law 115-3, H.R. 72, 1/31/17; CQ, 1/17/17; H.R. 72, Vote 28, 1/17/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GovTrack: “Supporters Say The Bill Will Increase Transparency And Efficiency By Bolstering One Of The Few Nonpartisan Agencies Tasked With Ensuring Government Accountability.” “Supporters say the bill will increase transparency and efficiency by bolstering one of the few nonpartisan agencies tasked with ensuring government accountability. ‘GAO is one of the most important tools used in this fight and the agency must have access to federal agency records to fully audit government programs. Unfortunately, even though GAO has the statutory right to inspect agency records, some federal agencies fail to cooperate and block the GAO from doing its job for Congress and the American people,’ House lead sponsor Carter said in a statement. ‘My legislation ensures federal agencies cooperate with GAO so they are able to access what is necessary to conduct their investigations.’” [GovTrack, 3/1/17] • Greene County Commonwealth: “The GAO Access And Oversight Act...Helps To Reduce Waste And Increase Accountability.” “This is the third McCaskill-backed bill that President Trump has signed into law. The Follow the Rules Act, which expands whistleblower protections, became law in June, and the GAO Access and Oversight Act, which helps to reduce waste and increase accountability, became law in February.” [Greene County Commonwealth, 7/11/17] • E&E News: GAO Access And Oversight Act “Would Strengthen The Federal Government’s Top Watchdog.” “The Senate is scheduled to vote on legislation today that would strengthen the federal government’s top watchdog. Leaders are holding a roll call vote on Georgia Republican Rep. Buddy Carter’s H.R. 72, the ‘GAO Access and Oversight Act of 2017.’ The bill would allow the Government Accountability Office to take civil action against agencies to obtain records. In addition, it would give GAO access to a federal database of new hires. The House passed the bill by voice vote during this Congress’ first week in session (E&E News PM, Jan. 4). Carter offered the proposal last year, only to see it pass the lower chamber but move no further.” [E&E Daily, 1/17/17]

COSPONSORS PRAISED THE GAO ACCESS AND OVERSIGHT ACT AS A WAY TO EXPOSE WASTE AND ABUSE IN FEDERAL SPENDING

Republican Senator And Cosponsor Ben Sasse Praised The GAO Access And Oversight Act As A Way To Help “Taxpayers’ Watchdogs Expose Washington Waste And Abuse.” “Although all eyes will be on the committee hearing rooms, the Senate will kick off the week with a 4:45 p.m. vote on the GAO Access and Oversight Act of 2017. Nebraska Republican Sen. Ben Sasse and Montana Democratic Sen. Jon Tester originally authored the legislation, which passed the House on Jan. 4. The bill would allow the Government Accountability Office to access federal records and audit programs, including giving the GAO standing in court to require agencies to provide records. ‘Taxpayers deserve a win for common sense and I’m grateful that we’re close to putting this important oversight bill on the president’s desk,’ Sasse said in a statement. ‘This is about helping taxpayers’ watchdogs expose Washington waste and abuse.’” [Roll Call, [1/17/17](#)]

- **Republican Senator And Cosponsor Ben Sasse: GAO Access And Oversight Act Was “An Important Step To Ensure That Washington Follows The Laws And The System Isn’t Being Gamed At The Taxpayers’ Expense.”** “Sens. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) and Jon Tester (D-Mont.) introduced the GAO Access and Oversight Act of 2016. ‘Our legislation is simple: Let the taxpayers’ watchdogs do their job,’ Sasse said in a press release. ‘Right now, GAO cannot access a critical database to prevent fraud in government programs. We fix that and ensure that GAO has full access to the National Directory of New Hires. It’s an important step to ensure that Washington follows the laws and the system isn’t being gamed at the taxpayers’ expense.’” [Federal News Radio, [4/27/16](#)]
- **Republican Sen. Ben Sasse: “The GAO Access And Oversight Act...Would Allow Government Watchdogs To Root Out Fraud And Abuse In The Federal Governments Biggest Spending Programs.”** “President Trump signed the GAO Access and Oversight Act of 2017 last night, making it one of the first measures to become law during his administration. The bill, authored by Senator Ben Sasse, would allow government watchdogs to root out fraud and abuse in the federal governments biggest spending programs. This law gives the watchdogs at the Government Accountability Office the tools they need. Hard-hitting and honest oversight of Washingtons bureaucracy is part of Congress job in our system of checks and balances. Too often, taxpayers foot the bill and assistance goes to the wrong folks when bureaucracies dont hold up their end of the bargain. Im grateful that the President signed this common-sense law and that taxpayers now have new tools to expose Washingtons waste and abuse.” [News Release, Office of Sen. Ben Sasse, [2/2/17](#)]

Republican Rep. Buddy Carter: GAO Access And Oversight Act “Will Better Equip Them To Audit Federal Programs On Behalf Of Taxpayers.” “GAO Access and Oversight Act The bill grants the Government Accountability Office access to the National Directory of New Hires, which is ‘a national repository of employment, unemployment insurance, and quarterly wage information,’ according to the Department of Health and Human Services...Rep. Earl Carter (R-Ga.), who is sponsoring the bill, said limiting the information available to the GAO limits the office’s ability to serve as ‘one of the most important tools taxpayers and Congress have to keep the federal government accountable.’ ‘This bill clarifies that the GAO has access to data, such as the directory of new hires, which will better equip them to audit federal programs on behalf of taxpayers,’ Carter said while defending the bill on the House floor.” [Federal News Radio, [1/4/17](#)]

Sen. Claire McCaskill: “The GAO Access And Oversight Act...[Is] A Key Tool For Cutting Waste And Fraud In Many Of The Government's Largest Programs.” MCCASKILL: “As a former state auditor, I consider government accountability as maybe the most important part of my work here in the Senate. Last week, President Trump signed into law the GAO Access and Oversight Act, a bipartisan measure that I co-sponsored to ensure that GAO has full access to the national database of new hires, a key tool for cutting waste and fraud in many of the government's largest programs as well as allowing states to aggressively pursue child support payments.” [Hearing, Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, [2/15/17](#)]

<p>Two. Improve Veterans' Health Care.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 2 IMPROVE VETERANS' HEALTH CARE</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: S. 114 VA Choice and Quality Employment Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-46, 8/12/17</p>	<p><u>PRESIDENT TRUMP SIGNED JON TESTER-NEGOTIATED BILL TO FUND THE CHOICE PROGRAM AND IMPROVE VETERANS CARE</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: "Bill to Boost VA Hiring, Private Care Heads to Trump's Desk." [Government Executive, 8/2/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: "Trump Signs \$3.9 Billion VA Funding Bill To Avert Crisis For Choice Program." [Stars & Stripes, 8/12/17]</p> <p>Stars & Stripes: Jon Tester Was Singled Out By Trump Administration As "Key In Passing" Legislation To Shore Up The Veterans Choice Program And Provide Funding For "Hiring Health Care Providers" And Implementing Provisions To Improve Hiring For The VA's Estimated 49,000 Vacancies. President Donald Trump on Saturday signed a \$3.9 billion funding deal for the Department of Veterans Affairs that will shore up the nearly bankrupt Veterans Choice Program and allow the VA to open 28 new clinics and implement new hiring programs. Trump signed the bill in Bedminster, New Jersey, where he's staying at his golf club on what he's called a 17-day 'working vacation.' The bill — a compromise created and supported by Democrats and Republicans — will provide \$2.1 billion to the Choice program, which allows veterans to seek care outside of the VA. It will also invest \$1.8 billion into hiring health care providers and leasing new clinics... After Shulkin said Walz and Tester were key in passing the legislation, Trump said: 'See, I can do it.'... With the signing, the VA can now implement a series of provisions to improve hiring for some of the agency's approximately 49,000 vacancies." [Stars & Stripes, 8/12/17; Public Law 115-46, S. 114, 8/12/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>New York Times: Jon Tester "Led The Negotiations" On The Successful Veterans Choice Emergency Funding Deal.</u> "Lawmakers reached a deal late Thursday to stave off a painful shutdown of the multibillion-dollar Choice Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. But the dayslong standoff over how to do so exposed fissures that could hinder efforts to craft a permanent solution... The deal to avert that came together in recent days, even as the Senate remained deeply divided in debate over a repeal of the Affordable Care Act and House lawmakers contended with a failed vote over a narrower Choice bill. Senator Johnny Isakson, Republican of Georgia and the Veterans Affairs Committee chairman, and the committee's top-ranking Democrat, Jon Tester of Montana, led the negotiations with their House counterparts, Phil Roe, Republican of Tennessee, and Tim Walz, Democrat of Minnesota." [New York Times, 7/27/17] <p><u>Military Times: "Compromise Package...Fund[ed] 28 New Medical Leases And Hundreds Of New Health Care Specialist Hires Within VA."</u> "The Choice program has proven controversial in recent years, with arguments over how to administer and fund initiatives that allow some veterans to seek private medical care at taxpayers expense. The compromise package, passed unanimously by the House just hours before they recessed last week, provides \$3.9 billion in emergency spending to keep the Choice program operating for six months while also funding 28 new medical leases and hundreds of new health care specialist hires within VA." [Military Times, 8/2/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Government Executive: Choice And Quality Employment Act Provided VA "An Influx Of Cash And Flexibility To Boost Its Facilities And Staffing Levels."</u> "The Veterans Affairs Department will soon receive an influx of cash and flexibility to boost its facilities and staffing levels, under a bill approved by the Senate Wednesday that will now head to President Trump's desk. The 2017 VA Choice and Quality Employment Act is a compromise bill put together to address a funding crisis for the Veterans Choice Program, an initiative to boost access to private sector care that was set to run out of funding this month. The measure was Congress' second attempt in recent weeks to save the program, with the first effort struck down by Democrats looking to preserve equal spending boosts for both internal and external health care." [Government Executive, 8/2/17] <p><u>Veterans Service Organizations: Choice Fix Legislation "Made Critically Important Investments In VA Health Care."</u> "The version that Trump signed Saturday also invests in VA clinics and personnel and passed unanimously in the House and Senate. Lawmakers in both</p>
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chambers praised it as an example of what can be done when both parties come together. The eight organizations that spoke against the initial bill said it was an indicator of VA care sliding too far into the private sector. In a statement, they said the final bill 'avoided an unnecessary crisis' and 'made critically important investments in VA health care.'" [Stars & Stripes, [8/12/17](#)]

Disabled American Veterans Executive Director: Choice Fix "Provide[d] VA With New Tools And Authorities To Recruit, Hire And Retain High-Quality Medical Professionals." "Veterans service organizations worked with Democrats to sink the previous iteration of Choice extension, but praised the compromises made in the passed legislation. Garry Augustine, executive director of Disabled American Veterans, praised lawmakers for passing the bill 'that will not only continue the Choice program uninterrupted, but also expand veterans' access to care by making critically-needed investments in the VA health care system.' He added it will 'provide VA with new tools and authorities to recruit, hire and retain high-quality medical professionals.'" [Government Executive, [8/2/17](#)]

Republican U.S. Senator Dean Heller: Choice And Quality Employment Act Would "Improve The Quality Of Care Veterans Receive." "U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) applauded the U.S. Senate's passage of his legislation, S.114, which provides funding for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to continue the Veterans Choice Program and improve the quality of care veterans receive in Nevada and around the country. As a senior member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and author of legislation used to advance the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act (S.114) in the U.S. House of Representatives, Heller played a pivotal role in sustaining funding for the Choice Program. Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed Heller's bill to ultimately approve the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act. Following the U.S. Senate's unanimous passage of the bill, the bill is expected to be signed into law by the President." [News Release, Office of U.S. Senator Dean Heller, [8/2/17](#)]

Federal News Radio: "The VA Choice And Quality Employment Act...Includes Some Significant Provisions Designed To Help The Department More Quickly Hire Medical Center Professionals, Retain High-Quality Senior Executives And Accurately Track A Growing Number Of Vacancies." "An additional \$2 billion for the Veterans Choice Program isn't the only provision lawmakers rushed to pass before leaving Friday for the August recess. Under the House Veterans Affairs Committee leadership, lawmakers managed to find a solution that replenishes the Veterans Choice Fund with an additional \$2.1 billion dollars and invests in key VA functions. But the VA Choice and Quality Employment Act also includes some significant provisions designed to help the department more quickly hire medical center professionals, retain high-quality senior executives and accurately track a growing number of vacancies." [Federal News Radio, [7/28/17](#)]

President Trump: "This Bill Will Ensure Veterans Will Continue To Have The Ability To See The Doctor Of Their Choice. So Important." "Without congressional action, the Choice program was expected to be depleted of money by mid-August, which VA leaders said would've led to layoffs and interrupted medical care for thousands of veterans. 'This bill will ensure veterans will continue to have the ability to see the doctor of their choice. So important,' Trump said. 'Our great veterans deserve only the best and that's what they're getting.'" [Stars & Stripes, [8/12/17](#)]

MULTIPLE PROVISIONS OF JON TESTER'S BETTER WORKFORCE FOR VETERANS ACT WERE SIGNED INTO LAW AS PART OF THE CHOICE EMERGENCY FUNDING FIX

HEADLINE: "Senators Hope To Help Veterans Affairs Fill Thousands Of Open Positions." [Federal News Radio, [6/13/17](#)]

Jon Tester Introduced The Better Workforce For Veterans Act To Help The VA To Fill Its 45,000 Vacancies By Giving It More Flexibility To Fill Open Regional Leadership Positions. On June 8, 2017, Jon Tester introduced S. 1325, the Better Workforce for Veterans Act. Federal News Radio reported: "Two senators have introduced legislation to help the Veterans Affairs Department better fill its 45,000 vacancies. Sens. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Jerry Moran (R-Kan.) introduced the Better Workforce for Veterans Act to give VA more funding and flexibility to fill open regional leadership positions. The bill would also require VA to

survey departing employees to find out why they're leaving. There are 38,000 vacant positions responsible for delivering front-line health care." [Federal News Radio, [6/13/17](#); S. 1325, Library of Congress, [6/8/17](#)]

Better Workforce For Veterans Act Would Require The VA To Create More Centralized Data On Hiring Effectiveness, A Standardized Exit Survey For Departing Employees, A Database Of Every Vacancy That Was Critical Or Difficult To Fill. "To help with recruiting, the Better Workforce measure would require VA to create more centralized data on hiring effectiveness, a standardized exit survey for departing employees and a database of every vacancy that is critical or difficult to fill. It would launch a 'human resources academy' within VA to ensure those employees maintain an adequate understanding of the department's civil service rules. Another, largely overlapping measure the committee considered would require an annual performance plan for political appointees, including metrics on recruiting, hiring, engaging and training employees. A companion bill to the latter workforce bill cleared the House in March by a 412-0 vote." [Government Executive, [7/11/17](#)]

- **Better Workforce For Veterans Act Provision Requiring The VA To Create A Database Of Critical Or Difficult To Fill Vacancies Was Signed Into Law.** "SEC. 208. RECRUITING DATABASE AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS. (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a single database that lists— (1) each vacant position in the Department of Veterans Affairs that the Secretary determines is critical to the mission of the Department, difficult to fill, or both; and (2) each vacant position in the Department of Veterans Affairs for a mental health professional. (b) QUALIFIED APPLICANT.—If the Secretary determines that an applicant for a vacant position listed in the database established under subsection (a) is qualified for such position but does not select the applicant for such position, the Secretary, at the election of the applicant, may consider the applicant for other similar vacant positions listed in the database for which the applicant is qualified. (c) PROLONGED VACANCIES.—If the Secretary does not fill a vacant position listed in the database established under subsection (a) after a period determined appropriate by the Secretary, the Secretary— (1) may ensure that applicants described in subsection (b) are considered for such position; and (2) may use the database established under subsection (a) to assist in filling such position. (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the use and efficacy of the database established under subsection (a)." [Public Law 115-46, [8/12/17](#); Text, S. 1325, Library of Congress, [6/8/17](#)]
- **Better Workforce For Veterans Act Provision Requiring The VA To Develop And Carry Out A Standardized Exit Survey For Career And Noncareer Employees And Executives Was Signed Into Law.** "SEC. 211. EXIT SURVEYS AT DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS. (a) EXIT SURVEYS REQUIRED.— (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and carry out a standardized exit survey to be voluntarily completed by career and noncareer employees and executives of the Department of Veterans Affairs who voluntarily separate from the Department. (2) CONSULTATION.—Such exit survey shall be developed in consultation with an appropriate non-Department entity with experience developing such surveys." [Public Law 115-46, [8/12/17](#); Text, S. 1325, Library of Congress, [6/8/17](#)]

Better Workforce For Veterans Act Would Provide Direct Hire Authority For Positions With A "Severe Shortage Of Candidates" And Qualified Recent Graduates And Post-Secondary Students. "Senators considered the Better Workforce for Veterans Act, which would provide direct hire authority for positions with a 'severe shortage of candidates,' as well as for certain qualified recent graduates and post-secondary students. Congress already gave the secretary direct hire authority for medical facility directors in the disciplinary process reform bill Trump signed last month. The measure would also create a 'talent exchange' in which private sector workers would temporarily fill VA slots while department employees would work at the private organization. The swaps would last between three months and four years." [Government Executive, [7/11/17](#)]

- **Better Workforce For Veterans Act Provision Expanding The VA's Direct Hiring Authority For Shortages Of Highly-Qualified Candidates Was Signed Into Law.** "SEC.

213. EXPANSION OF DIRECT-HIRING AUTHORITY FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IN CASE OF SHORTAGE OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED CANDIDATES. Section 3304(a)(3)(B) of title 5, United States Code, is amended by inserting '(or, with respect to the Department of Veterans Affairs, that there exists a severe shortage of highly qualified candidates)' after 'severe shortage of candidates'." [Public Law 115-46, [8/12/17](#); Text, S. 1325, Library of Congress, [6/8/17](#)]

- **Better Workforce For Veterans Act Provision Requiring The VA To Allow For Excepted Service Appointments Of Students And Recent Graduates Leading To Conversion To Career Or Career Conditional Employment Was Signed Into Law.** "SEC. 206. EMPLOYMENT OF STUDENTS AND RECENT GRADUATES BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS. (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall prescribe regulations to allow for excepted service appointments of students and recent graduates leading to conversion to career or career conditional employment of a student or recent graduate of a qualifying educational institution, as defined by the Department. (b) APPLICABILITY.—The conversion authority described in subsection (a) shall be applicable to individuals in good standing who— (1) are employed in a qualifying internship or fellowship program at the Department; (2) are employed in the Department in a volunteer capacity and performing substantive duties comparable to those of individuals in internship or fellowship programs and meet the required number of hours for conversion; (3) are employed in the Department under a contract or agreement with an external nonprofit organization and performing substantive duties comparable to those of individuals in internship or fellowship programs; (4) have received educational assistance under chapter 33 of title 38, United States Code; or (5) graduated from a qualifying educational institution, as defined by the Department, and have not reached 30 years of age. (c) UNIFORMITY.—For the purposes of paragraphs (2) and (3) of subsection (b), hours of work performed by an individual employed shall be considered equal to those performed by an individual employed in a qualifying internship or fellowship program by the Department." [Public Law 115-46, [8/12/17](#); Text, S. 1325, Library of Congress, [6/8/17](#)]

Better Workforce For Veterans Act Would Create A "Talent Exchange" In Which Private Sector Workers Would Temporarily Fill VA Slots While Department Employees Would Work At Their Private Organization. "Senators considered the Better Workforce for Veterans Act, which would provide direct hire authority for positions with a 'severe shortage of candidates,' as well as for certain qualified recent graduates and post-secondary students. Congress already gave the secretary direct hire authority for medical facility directors in the disciplinary process reform bill Trump signed last month. The measure would also create a 'talent exchange' in which private sector workers would temporarily fill VA slots while department employees would work at the private organization. The swaps would last between three months and four years." [Government Executive, [7/11/17](#)]

- **Measure Signed Into Law Contained Provision Establishing The VA Executive Management Fellowship Program To Allow Department And Participating Private Sector Employees To Swap Employers For A Year.** "SEC. 202. ESTABLISHMENT OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM. (a) FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.—Chapter 7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter: 'SUBCHAPTER III—EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM '§ 741. Executive Management Fellowship Program '(a) FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.—There is in the Department an Executive Management Fellowship Program. The purpose of the program shall be to provide— '(1) eligible employees of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Health Administration with training and experience in the private sector; and '(2) eligible employees of a private-sector entity with training and experience in the Department of Veterans Affairs. '(b) FELLOWSHIP.—(1) A fellowship provided under this section is a 1-year fellowship during which— '(A) with respect to a Department participant, the participant receives training and experience at a private-sector entity that is engaged in the administration and delivery of health care or other services similar to the benefits administered by the Secretary; and '(B) with respect to a private-sector participant, the participant receives training and experience at the Veterans Benefits Administration or the Veterans Health Administration. '(2) The Secretary shall enter into such agreements with

	<p>private-sector entities as are necessary to carry out this section.” [Public Law 115-46, 8/12/17; Text, S. 1325, Library of Congress, 6/8/17]</p>
<p>Three. Cut red tape at the VA.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 3 CUT RED TAPE AT THE VA</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: H.R. 2288 Veterans Appeals Improvement And Modernization Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-55, 8/23/17</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER-SPONSORED LEGISLATION STREAMLINING VETERANS DISABILITY APPEALS WAS SIGNED INTO LAW</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “Trump Signs Tester’s VA Bill To Streamline Appeals For Disability.” [Missoula Current, 8/24/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Trump Signs Bill to Speed Up VA Disability Appeals Process.” [Military.Com, 8/23/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “President Signs Tester’s Bill To Reform VA Disability Appeals.” [KECI, 8/23/17]</p> <p>Jon Tester-Sponsored Veterans Appeals Improvement And Modernization Act Was Signed Into Law By President Trump, To Allow The VA To Address Its Appeals Backlog In Part By Giving More Appeal Options To Veterans. On May 3, 2017, Jon Tester was listed as an original cosponsor of S. 1024. KECI reported: “In Nevada Wednesday, President Donald Trump signed U.S. Sen. Jon Tester’s bipartisan bill to streamline the appeal process for VA disability benefits. Tester’s Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act will allow the VA to address the massive appeals backlog that has more than 470,000 veterans waiting for a decision on their disability claims. The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act will give veterans three options: they can appeal their existing claim to a higher-level office, appeal at the same office with new information or appeal directly to the Board of Veterans Appeals.” [KECI, 8/23/17; Public Law 115-55, H.R. 2288, 8/23/17; Cosponsors, S. 1024, Library of Congress, 5/3/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KECI: “President Donald Trump Signed U.S. Sen. Jon Tester’s Bipartisan Bill To Streamline The Appeal Process For VA Disability Benefits.” [KECI, 8/23/17] <p>Department Of Veterans Affairs Spokesman: Appeals Legislation Would “Streamline The Lengthy Process That Veterans Undergo When Appealing Their Claims For Disability Benefits.” “President Donald Trump was expected to sign a new law Wednesday aiding veterans seeking help for disabilities. The legislation, formally called the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, will ‘streamline the lengthy process that veterans undergo when appealing their claims for disability benefits’ with the Department of Veterans Affairs, a White House spokesperson told Fox News ahead of Trump’s signing.” [Fox News, 8/23/17]</p> <p>Military.Com: “Advocates For The Bill Said It Would Give Veterans More Options On How To Appeal Benefits Decisions They Think Are Unfair And Do Not Compensate Them Adequately.” [Military.Com, 8/23/17]</p> <p>Veterans Appeals Improvement And Modernization Act Increased Transparency By Requiring The VA To Public Performance Outcomes Relating To Its New Appeals Process Online. “The Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act will also give veterans three options, including the right to appeal their existing claim to a higher-level office. It also enables them to appeal at the same office with new information, or appeal directly to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. Tester said his bill also holds the VA accountable by requiring a comprehensive implementation plan for the new appeals process. In addition, it also increases transparency by requiring the VA to publish on its website performance outcomes relating to the new appeals process. Wednesday’s passage by the committee comes on a heels of a recent listening tour conducted by Tester, during which he met with Missoula-area veterans to hear their concerns about the VA.” [Missoula Current, 6/28/17]</p>
<p>Four. Expanded our education benefits.</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER-SPONSORED BILL EXPANDING EDUCATION BENEFITS FOR VETERANS WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p>

ONSCREEN: 4
EXPAND
EDUCATION
BENEFITS

BILL
ILLUSTRATION:
H.R. 3218
Harry W. Colmery
Veterans Education
Assistance Act

SOURCE: PUBLIC
LAW 115-48, 8/16/17

Jon Tester-Sponsored Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act Was Signed Into Law By President Trump. On July 20, 2017, Jon Tester was listed as an original cosponsor of S. 1598. The [Billings Gazette](#) editorial board wrote: "According to Tester's office, Trump has signed five other veterans bills the senator co-sponsored, ranging from improving the Veterans Choice program to protecting VA whistleblowers and supporting veterans education benefits. Yet the work is not done. Montana veterans generally report they receive good care — when they can access it. Access obstacles and staff shortages continue to hamper VA Montana. Having no dental care in the Billings dental office for an entire year is a symptom of the persistent problems that keep VA from delivering the best care at the best time — every time." [Editorial, [Billings Gazette](#), [10/12/17](#); Public Law 115-48, H.R. 3218, [8/16/17](#); S. 1598, Cosponsors, Library of Congress, [7/20/17](#)]

- **TIME: Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act Passed Into Law Was "A Major Expansion To The Education Benefits For U.S. Military Veterans."** "In a rare moment of unity, lawmakers in Washington, D.C., just passed a major expansion to the education benefits for U.S. military veterans. The bill, called the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2017, flew through both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the span of three weeks, passing both by unanimous votes. After the Senate's vote on Wednesday, the bill is headed to President Trump's desk, where it's expected he'll sign. Veterans advocates have been pushing for improvements to the GI Bill, which was created after World War II, for a couple years. And in fact, this bill is actually the culmination of 18 separate bills. A long-valued military benefit, the GI Bill can offer significant tuition assistance. Payments vary depending on how long a veteran served on active duty, how many credits he or she is taking, and the type of college attended—although at most public colleges, the GI Bill will cover the entire tuition bill. Since 2009, more than 350,000 veterans have earned postsecondary certificates and degrees through the GI Bill." [TIME, [8/3/17](#)]
- **Stars & Stripes: Forever G.I. Bill Was "A Large Expansion Of Veterans Education Benefits."** "Two other VA-related bills are awaiting Trump's signature. On Friday, the House sent Trump a bill to reform the process veterans use to appeal denials of their claims for benefits. The bill aims to shorten the amount of time veterans wait for decisions, which now averages six years. A large expansion of veterans education benefits – the 'Forever GI Bill' -- was also sent to Trump's desk Aug. 2." [Stars & Stripes, [8/12/17](#)]

Measure Eliminated G.I. Bill Benefit Expiration Date For New Enlistees, Allowing Adult Veterans To Return To School Or Retrain. "Here are the bill's biggest changes for student veterans. It eliminates the time limit to use benefits. In one of its most prominent changes, the bill does away with benefit expiration dates for any new enlistees—hence its nickname, the 'Forever GI Bill.' Until now, veterans had 15 years after they were discharged to use the money. This will help adult veterans return to school or retrain for a changing job market." [TIME, [8/3/17](#)]

Measure Made National Guard And Reserve Members And Purple Heart Recipients Eligible For Expanded G.I. Bill Education Benefits. "It expands access to a wider group of service members. National Guard and Reserve members will now be eligible for expanded education benefits. And any member who receives a Purple Heart—regardless of how long they have served—will be eligible for the full benefits." [TIME, [8/3/17](#)]

Measure Restored G.I. Bill Benefits To Veterans Whose For-Profit Colleges Abruptly Shut Down In The Middle Of A Semester. "It restores benefits for veterans whose colleges shut down in the middle of the semester. This provision is specifically designed to help veterans affected by the abrupt closures of massive for-profit chains in recent years, and to shield veterans from future closures. Any veteran who attends a college that closes in the middle of a semester will have that semester's benefits fully restored." [TIME, [8/3/17](#)]

Measure Offered Additional Money To Veterans Enrolled In STEM Degree Programs. "It gives an extra boost to students in STEM programs. The expansion emphasizes science, technology, engineering, and math degrees by offering additional money to veterans enrolled in those programs. Veterans would have to apply for a specific STEM scholarship, and could get

	<p>either nine months of additional GI Bill benefits or a lump sum of \$30,000. (The scholarship is limited to \$100 million a year in aggregate benefits.)” [TIME, 8/3/17]</p> <p>Measure Dedicated More Resources To Technology And Training Aimed At Making The G.I. Bill Run More Smoothly. “It (hopefully) eases the red tape for veterans trying to access their benefits. Among its other provisions, the bill also has one critical, but less flashy, component: more resources dedicated to technology and training aimed at making the program run more smoothly. Specifically, it sets aside \$30 million to improve information technology for GI Bill claims processing at the Veterans Benefits Administration, part of the Department of Veterans Affairs. It also requires the department to provide training requirements for school certifying officers—the college staff members who are responsible for completing all the paperwork to verify that an enrolled student is eligible for benefits.” [TIME, 8/3/17]</p>
<p>Five. Did right by our cops, firefighters, and paramedics</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 5 STAND UP FOR FIRST RESPONDERS</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: H.R. 1892 Honoring Hometown Heroes Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-123, 2/9/18</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER BILL HONORING FIRST RESPONDERS WHO DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “Sen. Moran And Bipartisan Group Of Senators Introduce Legislation To Honor First Responders.” [Hays Post, 5/16/17]</p> <p>Jon Tester Legislation Authorizing Governors To Mark The Death Of First Responders Who Died In The Line Of Duty By Flying The American Flag At Half-Staff Was Signed into Law By President Trump. On May 11, 2017, Jon Tester introduced S. 1108, the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act. The Portland Press Herald reported: “MEMORIALIZING FIRST RESPONDERS: The House passed the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act (H.R. 1892), sponsored by Rep. John B. Larson, D-Conn., to authorize orders by governors to have the U.S. flag flown at half-staff to mark the deaths of first responders who have died on the job. Larson said deceased first responders deserve the simple but powerful tribute of a lowered American flag ‘when they have given the full measure of their devotion to their community, their state, and this nation.’” [S. 1108, Library of Congress, 5/11/17; Related Bill, H.R. 1892, Library of Congress, 4/4/17; Portland Press Herald, 5/20/17; Public Law 115-123, 2/9/18]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Safety Officer Definition Included Law Enforcement Officer, Firefighter, And “A Member Of A Rescue Squad Or Ambulance Crew...Engaging In Rescue Activity Or In The Provision Of Emergency Medical Services.” “(9) ‘public safety officer’ means- (A) an individual serving a public agency in an official capacity, with or without compensation, as a law enforcement officer, as a firefighter, or as a chaplain; (B) an employee of the Federal Emergency Management Agency who is performing official duties of the Agency in an area, if those official duties- (i) are related to a major disaster or emergency that has been, or is later, declared to exist with respect to the area under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.); and (ii) are determined by the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to be hazardous duties; (C) an employee of a State, local, or tribal emergency management or civil defense agency who is performing official duties in cooperation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in an area, if those official duties- (i) are related to a major disaster or emergency that has been, or is later, declared to exist with respect to the area under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq.); and (ii) are determined by the head of the agency to be hazardous duties; or (D) a member of a rescue squad or ambulance crew who, as authorized or licensed by law and by the applicable agency or entity, is engaging in rescue activity or in the provision of emergency medical services.” [34 USC 10284: Definitions, Title 34-Crime Control And Law Enforcement, as of 1/25/18; Text – Engrossed Senate Amendment, H.R. 1892, Library of Congress, 11/28/17] <p>National Volunteer Fire Council Endorsed Jon Tester’s Honoring Hometown Heroes Act. “On May 3 the House Judiciary Committee passed the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act (H.R. 1892), which would formally authorize state governors to declare that the U.S. flag be flown at half-staff to honor a public safety officer who dies in the line of duty. H.R. 1892 was introduced by Representative John Larson (D-CT). Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) has introduced companion legislation (S. 1108). The NVFC supports the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act.” [News Release, National Volunteer Fire Council, 5/16/17]</p>

	<p>Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association Endorsed The Honoring Hometown Heroes Act. “FLEOA supports the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act of 2016 The Honoring Hometown Heroes Act amends the Flag Code to permit the Governor of a state or territory (or the mayor of the District of Columbia) to order the American flag to be lowered to half-staff in the tragic event that a first responder from that jurisdiction dies while serving in the line of duty.” [News, Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, 6/15/16]</p> <p>National Fraternal Order Of Police Endorsed Jon Tester’s Honoring Hometown Heroes Act. [Letter to Sen. Jon Tester, National Fraternal Order Of Police, 5/12/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Fraternal Order Of Police President Chuck Canterbury: “I Want To Thank You For This Legislation To Honor The Men And Women Of Law Enforcement Who Have Died In The Line Of Duty.” [Letter to Sen. Jon Tester, National Fraternal Order Of Police, 5/12/17]
<p>Six. Support for our caregivers.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 6 SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: H.R. 3819 The VA Expiring Authorities Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-62, 9/29/17</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER-CHAMPIONED BILL EXTENDING AUTHORIZATION OF PROGRAMS HELPING CAREGIVERS WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “Tester Named One Of Congress’s Most Effective Senators; 7th Bill Heads To Trump.” [Missoula Current, 9/29/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Isakson Applauds House Passage of ‘VA Authorization Act 2017’ Bipartisan Isakson-Roe-Tester-Walz Legislation Continues Critical Veteran Programs, Services, Benefits.” [Majority News Release, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, 9/25/17]</p> <p><u>Billings Gazette</u> Editorial: “President Donald Trump Signed Into Law A Bipartisan Bill To Prevent Numerous Veterans’ Benefits From Expiring...Championed By Sen. Jon Tester.” “Just last week, President Donald Trump signed into law a bipartisan bill to prevent numerous veterans’ benefits from expiring. The VA Expiring Authorities Act, championed by Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana, ensures rural veterans who use transportation assistance to travel to and from medical appointments will have those services available through 2019. The new law also continues the Caregiver Support Program, which provides assistance to those who care for veterans; the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, which provides housing, counseling and career training to homeless or at-risk veterans; and the Deborah Sampson Act, which provide more opportunities for women veterans to seek readjustment counseling.” [Editorial, Billings Gazette, 10/12/17; Public Law 115-62, H.R. 3819, 9/29/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2017 Reauthorized Funding For Assistance And Support To Veterans’ Caregivers At \$839,828,000. [Majority News Release, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, 9/25/17; FY2018 Extenders Summary, Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, accessed 1/24/18] • <u>Billings Gazette</u> Editorial: “The VA Expiring Authorities Act, Championed By Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana...Continues The Caregiver Support Program, Which Provides Assistance To Those Who Care For Veterans.” [Editorial, Billings Gazette, 10/12/17] • <u>Missoula Current</u>: Jon Tester’s VA Expiring Authorities Act “Funds The Caregiver Support Program, Which Provides Assistance To Those Who Care For Veterans.” “On the same day the rankings were released, Tester sent his latest bill to Trump’s desk for signing, a move that sets the VA Expiring Authorities Act into law. Tester said the bill will prevent a number of benefits available to veterans from expiring. It also ensures that transportation provided to rural veterans for appointments will remain in service through 2019. The bill also funds the Caregiver Support Program, which provides assistance to those who care for veterans. It also extends the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, which provides critical housing, counseling and career training to homeless or at-risk veterans.” [Missoula Current, 9/29/17]

<p>Seven. Got us the gear we need.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: 7 SECURE GEAR FOR FIREFIGHTERS</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: H.R. 4661 AFG And SAFER Program Reauthorization Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-98, 1/3/18</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER-SPONSORED MEASURE TO EXTEND FIREFIGHTER GRANT PROGRAMS WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “Firefighter Grant Program Extended.” [Jefferson City News-Tribune, 1/12/18]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Bill Reauthorizing Grant Programs For Local Fire, Rescue Departments Heads To President’s Desk.” [Homeland Preparedness News, 12/29/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Congress Reauthorizes Firefighter Grant Programs, U.S. Fire Administration.” [News Release, Congressional Fire Services Institute, 12/21/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “McCain Bill To Reauthorize Fire & Emergency Response Grant Programs Moves To President’s Desk For Signature.” [News Release, Office of Sen. John McCain, 12/22/17]</p> <p>Jon Tester-Sponsored Bipartisan Measure Reauthorizing AFG And SAFER Grant Programs Through FY2023 Became Law. On April 5, 2017, Jon Tester cosponsored S. 829. Homeland Preparedness News reported: “The Assistance to Firefighters (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant programs will be reauthorized through fiscal year 2023 under a bill that the U.S. Senate recently approved. The Fire Grants Reauthorization Act would ensure that the nation’s fire and rescue services continue to receive federal grants that support training, equipment and staffing needs. The bill was introduced by U.S. Sens. John McCain (R-AZ), Jon Tester (D-MT), Susan Collins (R-ME) and Tom Carper (D-DE).” [Homeland Preparedness News, 12/29/17; Cosponsors, S. 829, Library of Congress, 4/5/17; Public Law 115-98, H.R. 4661, 1/3/18]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Montana Standard: “Tester Has Introduced The Bipartisan AFG And SAFER Program Reauthorization Act To Reauthorize The SAFER Grants.” “In addition to securing these firefighting grants, Tester has introduced the bipartisan AFG and SAFER Program Reauthorization Act to reauthorize the SAFER grants, which are set to expire in January 2018. That bill, cosponsored by Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.), has passed out of the Homeland Security Committee and is waiting a vote on the Senate floor.” [Montana Standard, 7/12/17] • Butte-Silver Bow Fire Chief Jeff Miller: “We Truly Appreciate Senator Tester’s Long-Standing Support Of Fire Services Throughout Montana And His Strong Understanding Of Public Safety.” “‘The Butte Silver Bow Fire Department appreciates the support of the Butte Chief Executive and Council of Commissioners for allowing us to pursue this grant,’ said Butte-Silver Bow Fire Chief Jeff Miller. ‘We truly appreciate Senator Tester’s long-standing support of fire services throughout Montana and his strong understanding of public safety. This funding will truly strengthen the community of Butte.’” [Montana Standard, 7/12/17] <p>HEADLINE: “Firefighters Could Lose Out On Major Government Funding.” [WPDE, 12/19/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Grant Allows Butte FD To Hire Four Additional Firefighters.” [Montana Standard, 7/12/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “City of Bozeman Receives FEMA Assistance to Firefighter Grant.” [Bozeman Magazine, 9/10/17]</p> <p>Congressional Research Service: Assistance To Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program “Provides Federal Grants Directly To Local Fire Departments And Unaffiliated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Organizations To Help Address A Variety Of Equipment, Training, And Other Firefighter-Related And EMS Needs.” “The Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) Program, also known as fire grants or the FIRE Act grant program, was established by Title XVII of the FY2001 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 106-398).</p>
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	<p>Currently administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the program provides federal grants directly to local fire departments and unaffiliated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) organizations to help address a variety of equipment, training, and other firefighter-related and EMS needs. A related program is the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) program, which provides grants for hiring, recruiting, and retaining firefighters.” [Assistance to Firefighters Program: Distribution of Fire Grant Funding, Congressional Research Service, 1/5/18]</p> <p>Montana Standard: “FEMA’s Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Program...Provides Money Directly To Fire Departments And Volunteer Firefighters To Help Increase And Maintain The Number Of Trained Firefighters In Rural Communities.” “U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., on Wednesday announced that the Butte-Silver Bow Fire Department will be receiving \$569,060 to hire four new additional firefighters. Tester, ranking member of the subcommittee that appropriates firefighting grants, has toured the Butte-Silver Bow Fire Department and been advocating for resources for them. ‘The fine folks at the Butte-Silver Bow Fire Department do great work every day keeping our community safe,’ said Tester. ‘These additional resources will help them increase the number of folks who are serving on the frontlines every day.’ The grant comes from FEMA’s Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response program, which provides money directly to fire departments and volunteer firefighters to help increase and maintain the number of trained firefighters in rural communities.” [Montana Standard, 7/12/17]</p>
<p>TESTER: Eight...(laughs) I’m out of fingers. But I’m not finished getting things done for Montana.</p> <p>I’m Jon Tester and I approve this message.</p> <p>ONSCREEN: JON TESTER FOR U.S. SENATE GETTING THINGS DONE FOR MONTANA APPROVED BY JON TESTER. PAID FOR BY MONTANANS FOR TESTER.</p>	
<p>ONSCREEN: 8 CUT BUREAUCRATIC RED TAPE</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: S. 544 Veterans Choice Program Improvement</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-26, 4/19/17</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER’S CHOICE PROGRAM FIX TO CUT RED TAPE AT THE VA WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “Trump Signs Tester’s Bill To Improve Veterans Choice Program: Bipartisan Measure Cuts Red Tape For Vets Seeking Health Care Closer To Home.” [Flathead Beacon, 4/19/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “President Signs Bill To Help Veterans, Tester Main Sponsor.” [KTVQ, 4/19/17]</p> <p>HEADLINE: “Veterans Finally Get Better ‘Choice.’” [Billings Gazette, Editorial, 4/25/17]</p> <p>Billings Gazette: “President Donald Trump...Signed Into Law The Changes Drafted By Sen. Jon Tester” Improving The Veterans’ Choice Program By Making The Department</p>

Of Veterans Affairs The Primary Payer To Doctors Caring For Veterans. On March 7, 2017, Jon Tester introduced S. 544. The [Billings Gazette](#) reported: “After years of private doctors going unpaid for caring for military veterans, the federal government is abandoning a program in which third-party contractors paid the bills. Veterans Affairs will be the primary payer to doctors caring for military veterans under the Veterans Choice Program. Veteran’s choice was created in 2014 in response to a health care crisis for military veterans, in which delayed federal care lead to the deaths of some veterans. The Choice Program quickly broke down. President Donald Trump on Wednesday signed into law the changes drafted by Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., and three Republican senators. Tester is the ranking member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.” [Billings Gazette, [4/20/17](#); Public Law 115-26, [4/19/17](#); S. 544, Library of Congress, [3/7/17](#)]

- **Flathead Beacon: “Tester’s Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act Cuts Red Tape For Veterans Seeking Health Care Closer To Home.”** “President Donald Trump today signed into law U.S. Sen. Jon Tester’s bipartisan legislation to begin to improve the Veterans Choice Program in Montana. Tester’s Veterans Choice Program Improvement Act cuts red tape for veterans seeking health care closer to home by making the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs the primary payer under the Choice Program, which will reduce out-of-pocket costs for veterans and align the Choice Program with VA’s other community care programs, according to a press release from the Democratic Montana senator’s office.” [Flathead Beacon, [4/19/17](#)]
- **Washington Examiner: “The Veterans Choice Improvement Act Removes Barriers That Congress Placed Around The Original ‘Choice’ Initiative And Eliminates An Expiration Date That Would Have Shuttered The Program In August.”** “President Trump signed legislation Wednesday that will dramatically expand a program at the Department of Veterans Affairs that lets patients seek care from private doctors if they want to bypass the troubled VA system. The Veterans Choice Improvement Act removes barriers that Congress placed around the original ‘choice’ initiative and eliminates an expiration date that would have shuttered the program in August.” [Washington Examiner, [4/19/17](#)]

Missoulia Editorial: “Tester Notched Another Victory For Reform With The Passage Of A Bill Aimed At Fixing The Three-Year-Old Veterans Choice Program.” “Earlier this month, Tester notched another victory for reform with the passage of a bill aimed at fixing the three-year-old Veterans Choice program, a key method of connecting veterans to health care in rural states like Montana. Nationally, the Choice program accounts for about 25 percent of community care.” [Missoulia, Editorial, [4/30/17](#)]

- **Billings Gazette: “Fixing the Choice Program Has Been A Priority For Tester.”** [Billings Gazette, [4/20/17](#)]

Billings Gazette Editorial: Jon Tester Showed “Leadership” In Fighting To Get Veterans Choice Program Improvements Signed Into Law By President Trump. “In his first 100 days in office, President Donald Trump was able to sign a health care bill that aims to improve service to veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA clinic or who would otherwise wait more than 30 days for a VA appointment. That good news is tempered by the fact that Veterans Choice improvement should have been signed into law a year ago. The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee approved similar improvements last May, with leadership from U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., now the ranking minority member, and Chairman Johnny Isakson, R-Ga. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell did not bring the committee-approved bill to the Senate floor. He missed the opportunity to do so in time for Memorial Day, and delayed past the beginning of the Oct. 1 fiscal year. The bill that finally became law with Trump’s signature last week was cosponsored by Tester, Isakson, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas.” [Billings Gazette, Editorial, [4/25/17](#)]

ONSCREEN: 9
MORE PAY FOR
GOLD STAR
FAMILIES

JON TESTER-SPONSORED COST-OF-LIVING INCREASE FOR VETERANS AND GOLD STAR SPOUSES AND CHILDREN WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP

BILL
ILLUSTRATION:
H.R. 1329
Veterans'
Compensation Cost
Of-Living Adjustment
Act

SOURCE: PUBLIC
LAW 115-75, 11/2/17

HEADLINE: "VA Disability Recipients And Retirees Are Getting Their Biggest Pay Raise Since 2012." [Task & Purpose/Military.Com, [10/27/17](#)]

HEADLINE: "Legislation Would Provide a COLA to Veterans." [Fed Smith, [3/6/17](#)]

Jon Tester-Sponsored Veterans' Compensation Cost-Of-Living Adjustment Act, Which Provided A Cost-Of-Living Increase To Dependency And Indemnity Compensation To Surviving Spouses, Was Signed Into Law By President Trump. On March 30, 2017, Jon Tester introduced S. 784, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act. [Fed Smith](#) reported: "A pair of bills would provide COLAs for military veterans and their families. Both bills are sponsored in the House by Congressman Mike Bost (R-IL). The Veterans' Compensation COLA Act of 2017 (H.R. 1329) would provide a COLA beginning December 1, 2017. The cost of living increase would be applied to:...Dependency and indemnity compensation to surviving spouses." [Cosponsors, S. 784, Library of Congress, [3/30/17](#); Public Law 115-75, H.R. 1329, [11/2/17](#)]

- **Military.Com: "Survivor Benefit Plan Beneficiaries And Those Who Draw Dependency And Indemnity Compensation (DIC), Can Also Expect To Benefit From The Bump."** [Task & Purpose/Military.Com, [10/27/17](#)]
 - **National Military Family Association: "Surviving Spouses Of Service Members Who Die On Active Duty Are Entitled To SBP Benefits."** [Benefits for Survivors of Active Duty Deaths, National Military Family Association, [4/2008](#)]
 - **Gold Star Wives Of America Arlington Chapter President Dr. Tracey Koehlmoos: "Widows Want The SBP, They Want The Full Amount From The DoD That Was Earned By The Widow And Her Beloved, As A Team...The SBP Represents The Commitment The DoD Made To The Soldier Being Continued To The Family."** "The last bit I will add is widows want the SBP, they want the full amount from the DoD that was earned by the widow and her beloved, as a team. They want the connection to the service. It is financial, of course, but also emotional. When your military spouse dies, you lose membership in your military community and are kicked out of your home. Whatever life you had is finished and you have to build a new life. It is gut wrenching. The SBP represents the commitment the DoD made to the soldier being continued to the family. Removing the DIC offset would add a life changing \$1254.19 a month to these struggling households." [Tracey Koehlmoos, Foreign Policy, [10/8/15](#)]
- **Stars & Stripes: "The New Increase Will Impact, Among Others, Wartime Disability Compensation Recipients, Compensation For Dependents, Certain Compensation For Surviving Spouses And Children Of Wounded Warriors."** [Stars & Stripes, [10/27/17](#)]
- **KTVZ: "Veterans' Compensation Cost-Of-Living Adjustment Act...Increases Disability Compensation For Veterans, Dependents, And Survivors."** "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (H.R. 1329) -- Increases disability compensation for veterans, dependents, and survivors by the same cost-of-living adjustment that Social Security recipients receive in 2018. Last Congress, the Veterans' Compensation COLA Act of 2016 passed the House of Representatives unanimously and was signed into law." [KTVZ, [6/1/17](#)]

Stars & Stripes: Veterans Compensation COLA Act Increased Cost-Of-Living Payments By 2 Percent, "One Of The Biggest Gains In At Least Six Years." "Military veterans could see their payouts increased by 2 percent later this year – one of the biggest gains in at least six years – under legislation slated for presidential approval next week. The plan, the Veterans' Compensation COLA Act of 2017, would boost cost-of-living payments and could be reflected in the recipient's January checks. The legislation was passed unanimously by the Senate this week, following approval of an identical bill in the House during summer." [Stars & Stripes, [10/27/17](#)]

ONSCREEN: 10
PROTECT
WHISTLEBLOWERS

BILL
ILLUSTRATION:
S. 1094
VA Accountability
And Whistleblower
Protection Act

SOURCE: PUBLIC
LAW 115-41, 6/23/17

JON TESTER-SPONSORED VA ACCOUNTABILITY AND WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION ACT WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP

HEADLINE: “Trump Signs Law to Make VA More Accountable for Vets' Care.” [US News & World Report, [6/23/17](#)]

Jon Tester-Sponsored VA Accountability And Whistleblower Protection Act Was Signed Into Law By President Trump. On May 11, 2017, Jon Tester was listed as an original cosponsor of S. 1094. The [Bozeman Daily Chronicle](#) reported: “Congress passed a bill Tuesday that would allow the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to more easily hold its employees accountable. The bill establishes the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, and gives the VA secretary the authority to expedite the removal, demotion or suspension of employees within the department. The bill was introduced to address loopholes in the VA department that allowed employees found guilty of wrongdoings to continue their employment...Democratic Sen. Jon Tester co-sponsored the bill and said it would streamline the process for reviewing and firing bad employees while protecting whistle blowers. Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida sponsored the bill.” [Cosponsors, S. 1094, Library of Congress, [5/11/17](#); Public Law 115-41, [6/23/17](#); Bozeman Daily Chronicle, [6/13/17](#)]

- **KECI:** “**Tester's Accountability Bill Puts VA Supervisors And Staff On Notice. No Longer Will It Be Acceptable For Caregivers To Put Themselves First While Veterans Suffer.**” “Thursday Tester co-sponsored another bill, the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, as a follow-up to an executive order Trump issued establishing an Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. It's another piece in a puzzle that Tester says must be pieced together if veterans are to receive the health care they've been promised. In broad strokes, Tester's accountability bill puts VA supervisors and staff on notice. No longer will it be acceptable for caregivers to put themselves first while veterans suffer.” [KECI, [5/11/17](#)]

Jon Tester-Sponsored VA Accountability Legislation Codified Office Of Accountability And Whistleblower Protection. “The 2017 VA Accountability and Whistleblower Accountability Act follows a similar bill the House approved by mostly partisan lines in March. Unlike the Senate bill, the House measure did not have any Democratic cosponsors and just 10 Democrats voted for it. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., who previously put forward companion legislation to the House bill, introduced the updated Senate measure, with Sens. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Jon Tester, D-Mont., the respective chairman and ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee...In another significant break from the House bill, the Senate measure would create a unique disciplinary process for members of the Senior Executive Service. Their firings, demotions and suspensions would take place on the same timeline as the rest of the workforce, but any appeals would be handled internally at the newly created Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection. President Trump -- who has advocated for more accountability at VA as a candidate on the campaign trail and again as president -- signed an executive order in April to create the office, which the Senate bill would codify. The timing of the internal grievance process would mirror that for unionized employees.” [Government Executive, [5/11/17](#)]

Fox News: Legislation Was “Meant To Protect Whistleblowers” Within The Department Of Veterans Affairs. “Trump signed in June VA reform legislation meant to protect whistleblowers within the department. The Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act allows for the removal, demotion or suspension of any VA employee with poor conduct or performance. It also allows the VA secretary to recoup any bonuses awarded to employees who have not acted properly.” [Fox News, [8/23/17](#)]

New York Times: Jon Tester Passed Into Law “Long-Held Priority” VA Accountability Legislation That “Makes It Easier For The Department To Fire Problematic Employees [And] Incentivizes Whistle-Blowing.” “Mr. Tester and Mr. Walz have shown that they are willing to maneuver their caucuses toward compromise if the Republican position is within range. To pass the accountability legislation, a long-held priority for both parties that had the support of influential veterans’ groups, the Democrats had to overcome initial opposition to weakening the protections afforded to department employees accused of wrongdoing. The changes were opposed by the largest federal workers’ union. The final legislation, which Mr.

	<p>Trump signed into law late last month, makes it easier for the department to fire problematic employees, incentivizes whistle-blowing and gives the secretary greater hiring authorities to fill vacant medical center director jobs.” [New York Times, 7/9/17]</p>
<p>ONSCREEN: 11 HONOR MONTANA’S ALEX DIEKMANN</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: S. 117 Alex Diekmann Peak Designation Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-122, 1/31/18</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER-SPONSORED BILL NAMING PEAK FOR MONTANA CONSERVATIONIST ALEX DIEKMANN WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “President Signs Bill For Alex Diekmann Peak.” [Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 2/2/18]</p> <p>Jon Tester Was An Original Cosponsor Of The Alex Diekmann Peak Designation Act Signed Into Law By President Trump. On January 12, 2017, Jon Tester was listed as an original cosponsor of S. 117. The Bozeman Daily Chronicle reported: “A mountain in the Madison Range will be named for the late Alex Diekmann, a prominent conservationist from Bozeman, now that a bill to name the peak has been signed into law. President Donald Trump on Wednesday signed a bill sponsored by all three members of Montana’s congressional delegation to name an unnamed peak for Diekmann, the final step needed to make the name official.” [Cosponsors, S. 117, Library of Congress, 1/12/17; Public Law 115-122, 1/31/18; Bozeman Daily Chronicle, 2/2/18]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016: Jon Tester Was An Original Cosponsor Of The Alex Diekmann Peak Designation Act. [Cosponsors, S. 3192, Library of Congress, 7/13/16]
<p>ONSCREEN: 12 TOXIC EXPOSURE DECLASSIFICATION ACT</p> <p>BILL ILLUSTRATION: S. 726 Gary Deloney And John Olsen Toxic Exposure Declassification Act</p> <p>SOURCE: PUBLIC LAW 115-91, 12/12/17</p>	<p><u>JON TESTER BILL AIMED AT HELPING BILLINGS VETERANS’ STRUGGLE WITH CLASSIFIED RECORDS AT VA WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP</u></p> <p>HEADLINE: “Bill Aimed To Help Billings Veterans’ Struggles With VA Signed Into Law.” [KTVQ, 12/12/17]</p> <p>Jon Tester Introduced The Gary Deloney and John Olsen Toxic Exposure Declassification Act, Signed Into Law By President Trump As Part Of The NDAA. On March 27, 2017, Jon Tester was listed as an original cosponsor of S. 726. KTVQ reported: “A bill named for a Billings veteran suffering from toxic exposure during his service in the 1960s was signed into law by President Trump, U.S. Sen Jon Tester announced Wednesday. The bipartisan Gary Deloney and John Olsen Toxic Exposure Declassification Act declassifies the records of Project SHAD, the Shipboard Hazard and Defense program, which allows Olsen of Billings and others to access Veterans Affairs disability benefits and care. Olsen, a Navy veteran, worked on the project testing biological and chemical weapons and was exposed to highly toxic carcinogens. He has fought cancer four times, and the VA had denied his claims because he lacked documentation from the classified project, according to Tester’s office.” [Cosponsors, S. 726, Library of Congress, 3/27/17; Sec. 737, Public Law 115-91, 12/12/17; KTVQ, 12/12/17]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Daily Inter Lake Editor Frank Miele Praised Jon Tester For Successfully Including His Bill To Declassify Military Service Records Of Veterans Exposed To Toxic Substances In The Final National Defense Authorization Act.</u> “Tester introduced a bill in March to declassify the military service records of veterans who were exposed to toxic substances as a result of their (often unwitting) participation in top-secret missions decades ago. Last week, he announced that the bill has been incorporated into the Senate’s version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. The House version of the bill originally didn’t include the declassification language, but by the end of the week, Sen. Tester announced that the final version of the bill passed by both houses included the military-records provision. The original Tester bill, which was co-sponsored by Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, is named after two veterans who suffered many years of health problems as a result of their exposure to toxic substances in Vietnam...‘Make no mistake. I’ll be the first in line to congratulate Sen. Tester when he actually gets something done for Montana’s Project SHAD/112 veterans. Until then, I’ll tell it like it is.’ Sen. Tester may now legitimately deserve that congratulations as the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act passed in Congress on Thursday. In a letter to Sen. John McCain and others, Tester and his co-

sponsors had pleaded, 'We cannot wait any longer. Many who served their country are now sick or have even died... we urge you to support this amendment that will help the brave people who participated in these tests.' Good for you, Sen. Tester. Now it's up to the president to sign the bill." [Frank Miele, Daily Inter Lake, [11/19/17](#)]

ONSCREEN: 13
IMPROVING RURAL
CALL RELIABILITY

BILL
ILLUSTRATION: S.
96
Improving Rural Call
Quality And
Reliability Act

SOURCE: PUBLIC
LAW 115-129,
2/26/18

JON TESTER-SPONSORED BILL TO IMPROVE RURAL CALL QUALITY WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT TRUMP

HEADLINE: "Tester Sends 13th Bill To Trump's Desk For Signature." [Missoula Current, [2/12/18](#)]

Jon Tester Was An Original Cosponsor Of The Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability Act Signed Into Law By President Trump. On January 11, 2017, Jon Tester was listed as an original cosponsor of S. 96. The Missoula Current reported: "A bill aimed at resolving delayed or dropped phone calls in rural America is heading to President Donald Trump's desk for signature, marking the 13th piece of legislation Sen. Jon Tester has sent to the president's desk this Congress...The latest bill will establish quality standards for intermediaries who transmit phone calls. Despite improved phone and Internet service in urban America, Tester said, nearly 20 percent of calls made in rural American are delayed, disrupted or dropped. The Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act follows a dozen other Tester bills that Trump has signed into law during this session of Congress, including several aimed at the Department of Veterans Affairs." [Cosponsors, S. 96, Library of Congress, [1/11/17](#); Public Law 115-129, [2/26/18](#); Missoula Current, [2/12/18](#)]

- **2015: Jon Tester Was An Original Cosponsor Of The Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability.** [Cosponsors S. 827, Library of Congress, [3/19/15](#)]
- **Rural Broadband Association Thanked Jon Tester For His Sponsorship Of The Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability Act.** "NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association today commended final passage of the Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act in the House of Representatives. Identical versions of the act passed in both the Senate and the House in 2017 before final passage today. The bill will now go to President Donald Trump to be signed into law. Mitigating call completion issues has long been a priority of the rural telecommunications industry, and NTCA applauds the many members of Congress and their staff who have worked diligently for several years to help address this issue. In particular, NTCA thanks Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D–Minn.), Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Chairman Sen. John Thune (R–S.D.), and Sen. Jon Tester (D–Mont.) for their sponsorship of the Senate Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act (S. 96), Reps. David Young (R–Iowa) and Peter Welch (D–Vt.) for their sponsorship of identical legislation in the House (H.R. 460), and for the support of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, including the committee's chairman Rep. Greg Walden (R–Oregon)." [News Release, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, [2/9/18](#)]

Politico: "Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability Act...Is Aimed At Reducing Dropped Calls Prevalent In Rural Parts Of The Country." "TRUMP SIGNS CALL COMPLETION BILL — President Donald Trump signed the Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act, S. 96 (115), into law Monday evening. The new law is aimed at reducing dropped calls prevalent in rural parts of the country." [Morning Tech, Politico, [2/27/18](#)]

- **Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability Act Would Establish Quality Standards For Intermediaries That Transmitted Phone Calls.** "The latest bill will establish quality standards for intermediaries who transmit phone calls. Despite improved phone and Internet service in urban America, Tester said, nearly 20 percent of calls made in rural American are delayed, disrupted or dropped. The Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act follows a dozen other Tester bills that Trump has signed into law during this session of Congress, including several aimed at the Department of Veterans Affairs." [Missoula Current, [2/12/18](#)]
- **Morning Consult: "The Improving Rural Call Quality And Reliability Act Would**

	<p>Require Phone Service Providers To Register With The FCC And Comply With To-Be-Established Standards To Improve Phone Call Reliability In Rural Regions.” [Morning Consult, 1/23/18]</p>
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