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February 23, 2016

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

According to multiple news reports, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is allowing calls into the dedicated crisis hotline to go to voicemail. Worse yet, those voicemails are not being returned and help is not being offered to those veterans.

We find these reports saddening and frustrating, especially considering the past problems in veteran treatment at VA hospitals. Your agency is obligated to provide essential and adequate care for our veterans and allowing their calls to end up in an unanswered voicemail inbox is a failure of great magnitude and appears to be a systemic problem. It must be rooted out and a culture of care and compassion put back in place so that veterans can once again rely upon and use the services the VA is obligated to provide them.

There are more than 21 million veterans across America, and if they cannot count on the VA to provide them with help and guidance in their time of greatest need then the VA has failed in its core mission. The veteran suicide rate is many times higher than the general population and there must be an internal investigation into the claims mentioned above to ensure that the problem can be identified and a solution put in place. We look forward to hearing your improvement plan for solving this problem and correcting the failure to show our veterans that the VA is there to help them get through tough times.

Sincerely,

Lynn Jenkins, CPA
Member of Congress

Kevin Yoder (KS-03)
Member of Congress

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