



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
DEMOCRATIC STAFF

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tester:

This letter provides the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) response to the February 28, 2017, National Academy of Medicine (NAM) report "Assessment of the Department of Veterans Affairs Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry." The NAM report consisted of a formal review of the registry, pursuant to Public Law 112-260 § 201 (b)(1)(A), that assessed its operations and utility.

The VA NAM Task Force (chaired by VA's Assistant Secretary for the Office of Enterprise Integration and includes the Executive in Charge for the Veterans Health Administration, the Under Secretary for Benefits, the VA General Counsel, and the Director for Regulation and Policy Management) reviewed the conclusions contained in the NAM report and concurred with the majority of recommendations on ways ahead.

Based on those recommendations, VA will move forward in several ways. For example, VA will continue to improve and employ the registry to better serve those Veterans of Iraq, Afghanistan, and the southwest Asia theater of operations. The NAM report also recommended that we remove some questions from the survey instrument that supports the registry; but we disagree as information gained from those answers helps us develop a standardized clinical occupational health exposure and assessment for each Veteran. Otherwise, we agree with report's key findings.

Overall, VA will continue to: (1) work internally and with the Department of Defense to enhance information in the registry; (2) champion related epidemiological studies about exposures; (3) message what we learn from the registry to clinicians, benefits providers, and Veterans; and (4) make it easier for Veterans to take the optional health examination associated with being a part of the registry.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission. Similar letters are being sent to the other leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Wilkie