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ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

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December 20, 2016

The Honorable Sloan Gibson
 Deputy Secretary
 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Deputy Secretary Gibson,

I am writing in response to your December 19, 2016, letter requesting that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs immediately repeal the restrictions on employee awards and incentives that were enacted as part of Public Law 114-198, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 (CARA), which provides crucial, life-saving assistance to veterans suffering from the tragic outcomes of opioid addiction.

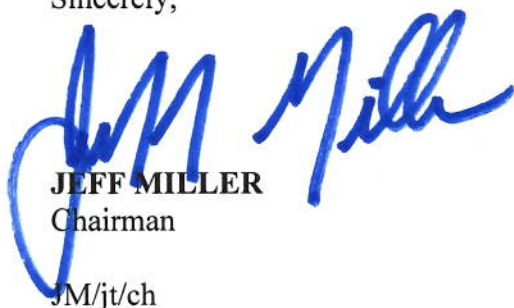
The final CARA conference report was a result of a completely transparent process. CARA began as S. 524, which proceeded through regular order and passed the Senate, as amended, on March 2, 2016. Meanwhile, efforts to assist veterans suffering from addiction began in part as H.R. 4063, the Jason Simcakoski PROMISE Act. H.R. 4063, which included as an offset these cuts to employee bonuses, likewise progressed through regular order and passed the House, as amended, on May 10, 2016. A months-long conference ensued, with Committee Members represented among the conferees negotiating language that affected the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The subsequent conference report passed both Chambers with near-unanimity in July 2016. That same month, the President signed CARA into law. Never once in this long, public process did the Administration criticize Congress for including the offsets you propose to repeal. On the contrary, the President said in his signing statement that he was "deeply disappointed that Republicans failed to provide any real resources" to make the changes provided for in the CARA bill. The House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs are proud to say that, in regards to provisions aimed at helping our nation's veterans, CARA *does* contain material offsets that will enable VA to make a difference for veterans in need.

Clearly, CARA was the result of many hours of negotiation, during which many difficult decisions were made. Among those difficult decisions were choices regarding how to ensure certain veteran provisions, critical for inclusion in CARA, had the funding needed to earn Congressional approval. Ultimately, the conferees agreed that a limitation on VA employee awards and incentives offered the best option for redirecting limited resources towards immediately impacting the lives of fragile veterans suffering from addiction.

We did not take the decision to limit employee compensation lightly and are aware that performance bonuses - while never guaranteed even in the private sector - do provide a productivity incentive. Recognizing the possible impact to those providing care on the front lines, Congress included language in Section 951 which encourages VA to prevent lower-paid VA employees from being unduly impacted by these cuts. However, the bottom line is we felt strongly that facilitating the recovery of veterans suffering from addiction was far more important than bankrolling employee bonuses. Therefore, as Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I cannot support a repeal of these offsets in the absence of a recommendation from you as to another source of funding from within VA.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Jon Towers, Majority Staff Director, at (202) 225-3527.

Sincerely,



JEFF MILLER
Chairman

JM/jt/ch

Cc: Phil Roe, Chairman-Elect
Mark Takano, Acting Ranking Member