

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 30, 2018

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

We are writing today to encourage you to use your authority as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a rigorous clinical trial into the safety and efficacy of medicinal cannabis for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and chronic pain so that we can better understand the potential benefits or dangers of medicinal cannabis.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is already conducting multiple small-scale studies into the potential health benefits of medicinal cannabis, and we believe VA has the authority, ability and capacity to carry out such a study. Many of our nation's veterans already use medicinal cannabis, and they deserve to have full knowledge of the potential benefits and side effects of this alternative therapy.

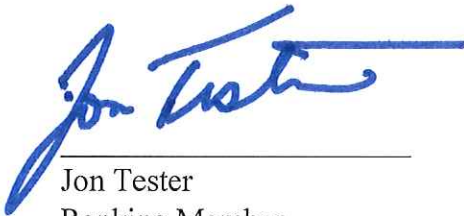
According to a recent New York Times article published on July 25, veterans in Northern California are lining up to receive free marijuana, often without a doctor's prescription or understanding of any potentially harmful drug interactions. These veterans primarily get their health care from VA, but because of restrictive regulations, VA doctors are barred from recommending and, until recently, discussing, medicinal cannabis. The pervasive lack of research makes their jobs even more difficult, leaving VA clinicians flying blind, without concrete recommendations to provide veterans. VA doctors deserve to be fully informed about medicinal cannabis so that they can provide fact-based guidance to their patients.

Without rigorous, Department-led research into the safety and efficacy of medicinal cannabis for treating veterans with PTSD and chronic pain, both VA doctors and veterans will remain in the dark about this potentially beneficial alternate treatment. In fact, many veterans state that cannabis is better at reducing and controlling their pain than prescription painkillers and opioids. While in the midst of a deadly opioid epidemic, it is irresponsible to turn a blind eye to a possible substitute to harmful opioids. Additionally, one study in New Mexico found that patients using cannabis experienced a 75 percent reduction in their Clinician Administered Posttraumatic Scale score compared to patients not using cannabis to treat their PTSD symptoms.

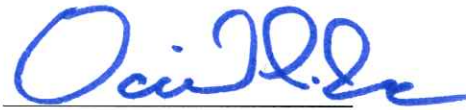
Many veterans with these invisible wounds are suffering, and the pharmaceuticals prescribed to them are not providing meaningful relief. VA already has the authority to conduct studies into the benefits and side effects of medicinal cannabis, and is in fact already conducting two small-scale studies. We strongly encourage VA to take its cues from veterans, who, according to The American Legion's survey of its membership, overwhelmingly support research into medicinal cannabis.

We, and all of our nation's veterans, look forward to your prompt response.

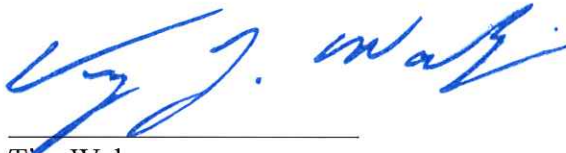
Sincerely,



Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs



David P. Roe, M.D.
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Tim Walz
Ranking Member
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs