

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **For Immediate Release:** | **Contact:**Megan Taylor |
| July 11, 2018 | 202-224-6244 |

**Heller, Boozman, Tester Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Address Physician Shortages at the Department of Veterans Affairs**

**WASHINGTON –**U.S. Senators Dean Heller (R-NV), John Boozman (R-AR), and Jon Tester (D-MT) today introduced the VA Hiring Enhancement Act, bipartisan legislation that aims to empower the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to better compete for the best and brightest doctors coming out of medical school by allowing the VA to extend contingency offers to residents earlier than currently authorized.

The VA, which has long struggled to recruit and retain highly qualified physicians, is currently at a disadvantage when it comes to recruiting medical students because the hiring process for private sector providers begins much earlier than the VA’s current hiring process. This results in the VA missing out on opportunities to compete for available residents, so this legislation introduced by a bipartisan group of senators aims to change that trend and level the competitive playing field for the VA.

“As a senior member of the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I’m working to see that every veteran has access to the quality care that they deserve. That’s why addressing the doctor shortage is a top priority of mine because it continues to particularly affect Nevada’s rural areas such as Elko, Gardnerville, and Pahrump, where the clinic that opened its doors two years ago still doesn’t have a full-time doctor,” **said Heller.** “I’m proud to join Senators Boozman and Tester to co-author this bipartisan legislation that aims to close the physician gap by making it easier for the VA to hire and retain skilled doctors to serve our nation’s heroes, and I look forward to continue working with them to send it to the President’s desk.”

Recently, Heller asked Mr. Robert Wilkie, the newly confirmed Secretary of the VA, hearing, [for solutions to address the doctor shortages that have particularly affected Nevada’s rural areas such as Elko and Gardnerville, as well as Pahrump](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=163616CC-40B6-42DA-8B78-C8E0B23AD34D), where a new VA clinic still does not have a full-time doctor on staff after opening its doors in 2016. Heller, [who worked for years to secure approval from the VA for construction of the clinic,](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=ED200184-5BB4-4685-9BF7-538C373DDB8C) received a commitment from Secretary Wilkie that he will work with Heller to get a full-time doctor in Pahrump by the end of this year.

“There are some incredible people working to deliver the best care to our veterans, but the VA simply does not have enough of them. For years, the VA has struggled to compete with the private sector to attract the best and brightest doctors. An answer to this problem has long eluded Congress, but we believe this bill can help make great strides to address the problem,” **Boozman said.**

“The VA must have qualified medical professionals on staff to serve veterans,” **said Tester, Ranking Member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee.** “The VA Hiring Enhancement Act addresses workforce shortages by making the VA more competitive with the private sector when it recruits talented doctors, clinicians, and medical students.”

The VA Hiring Enhancement Actis among legislation that will be discussed during the U.S. Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearing tomorrow, Wednesday, August 1st, 2018. The bill has the support of key Veterans Service Organizations including the American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans & Military Families for Progress.

Specifically, the*VA Hiring Enhancement Act*seeks to:

* Allow the VA to release physicians from non-compete agreements, provided they commit to VA services for at least one year, which makes it easier to hire local doctors since non-compete contracts are often designed to prevent doctors from competing with their previous employer in the same local area;
* Grant the VA authority to make binding job offers up to two years prior to completion of residency which would help the VA become more proactive in its healthcare provider hiring practices and is particularly important to attracting specialists; and
* Set the minimum education requirement for VA doctors as completion of residency.

The VA believes that portions of the bill “solves a problem known to medical facility Chiefs of Staff across the country,” and that the “legislation should make it easier to hire physicians.”

###

