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March 9, 2018

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INHOFE, LANKFORD, MULLIN AND RUSSELL INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE VETERAN HEALTH CARE

OKLAHOMA CITY – U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) and Congressman Markwayne Mullin (OK-02) held a press conference at the Oklahoma City VA today where they were joined by local veteran Pete Peterson, Oklahoma City VA Director Wade Vlosich and Muskogee VA Director Mark Morgan. Together, they announced a new initiative to help each of Oklahoma's VA facilities achieve a five star rating, indicating they are the two of the highest performing VA facilities in the country.

Additionally, Sen. Inhofe and Congressman Mullin announced they were introducing legislation, cosponsored by Sen. Lankford and Rep. Russell, to require all VA Medical Centers to present a plan to reach five star ratings.

"In the past few years, we've made significant progress to improve the standard of care our veterans receive by installing and empowering new leadership and promoting greater transparency. I'm proud of our VA directors and the culture of improvement and accountability they have built. I'm eager to work with them and get them any tools or authorities they need to reach a five star-status," **Sen. Inhofe said.** "By saying that we're going to aim for the highest rating, all of us here today are committing to a culture of continuous improvement at the VA. Our legislation, which would require all VA facilities to submit a plan of how to achieve a five-star rating, would seek to instill that same attitude in VAs around the country so that our veterans receive the best care possible."

"The men and women who have fearlessly served our nation deserve first-class, or in this case, 5-star health care," **said Sen. Lankford.** "The requirement for a specific improvement plan proposed in this bill will assist the VA to achieve the care that our military men and women deserve, and I'm honored to partner with Senator Inhofe, Congressman Mullin and Congressman Russell to introduce a plan that helps the nation's VA health care facilities continue to improve." "Our nation's veterans deserve five star care no matter which VA health care facility they choose," **said Rep. Mullin.** "I'm proud to help introduce legislation that brings greater accountability to the VA facilities serving our veterans. The VA Medical Center Improvement Act instructs underperforming VA facilities to devise a plan to deliver better health care to our veterans. The VA should consistently strive to improve and modernize the care our veterans receive and I'm grateful this piece of legislation brings us one step closer to high quality health care for all of our veterans."

"Having served for 21 years in the Army, I know firsthand how much our soldiers sacrifice in defense of our republic," **Rep. Russell said.** "Our veterans deserve the very best medical care; anything less than the highest standard is unacceptable. S. _____ will push our VA medical facilities to deliver the quality of care that our veterans deserve. I'm proud to support this important legislation, and will be introducing a companion bill in the House."



Background about the Department of Veterans' Affairs Ratings:

The Veterans Health Administration uses a unified system for summarizing hospital system performance at individual VA Medical Centers based on 25 quality measures that include complications, patient satisfaction, wait times and staff turnover. The VA Medical Centers are evaluated then awarded ratings, on a scale of 1-5 based both on their relative performance to other VA facilities as well as on year-to-year improvement. While the relative nature of the star system means not every facility will be able to achieve the highest rating, the legislation being introduced seeks to raise the level of patient care across the board by increasing competition for the highest level of ratings.

Background on Sen. Inhofe's work to improve veteran health care:

- On Nov. 30, 2015, VISA 19 sent two teams to investigate operations at the Muskogee VA center, one that looked at quality of care and the other that looked at management of the facility. Their visits resulted in the immediate shut down of intermediate surgeries at the Muskogee facility due to issues that were discovered. It also prompted the removal of the facility's Chief of Staff on Feb. 9.
- On Dec. 23, 2015, Inhofe contacted VISA 19 Network Director Ralph Gigliotti and requested his personal assistance in ensuring proper care is provided to the five veterans identified in the Dec. 23, 2015, USA Today [article](#).
- In January 2016, Inhofe requested that the VA IG visit Oklahoma VA facilities with a third party entity since past VA IG reports had not indicated any problems in Oklahoma's VA facilities. This request was denied.
- On Feb 1, 2016, Inhofe placed a hold on the Veterans Affairs Inspector General nominee until the VA agreed to send an outside entity to investigate Oklahoma's VA facilities.
- On Feb. 12, 2016, Inhofe and Lankford introduced S. 2554, the Veterans Affairs Accountability Act, which would give authority to the Secretary of the VA to remove or demote a VA employee based on performance or misconduct and allow independent, third party oversight at VA facilities.
- On Feb. 23, 2017, Sen. Inhofe announced on the Senate floor that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has committed in writing to conduct investigations of Oklahoma's VA hospitals in coordination with an outside entity, a condition made by Inhofe prior to allowing confirmation of the VA Inspector General nominee.
- On June 23, 2017, President Trump signed S. 1094 the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act into law. This bill gives greater authority to VA directors to fire poorly performing employees. This legislation contained portions of S.2554, which Inhofe introduced the previous year.
- On July 10, 2017 the VA IG released a report following an investigation of the Muskogee VA that was done in conjunction with a third party, the Joint Commission. The report provided over 20 recommendations to improve the facility and care provided, which Director Wade Vlosich committed to implementing.
- On August 14, 2017, President Trump signed S.114, to extend the Veterans Choice Program.
- On November 2, 2017 the VA IG released a report following an investigation of the Oklahoma City VA that was done in conjunction with a third party, the Joint Commission. The report provided over 20 recommendations to improve the facility and care provided, which Director Wade Vlosich committed to implementing.
- On December 20, 2017, President Trump signed S.1266, the Enhancing Veterans Care Act. Sen. Inhofe, Sen. Lankford and Rep. Mullin, authored this legislation to provide greater accountability and allow independent oversight at Veterans Affairs facilities, which was a core component of the legislation they introduced on February 12, 2016, S. 2554.

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2018

Kristopher Wade Vlosich
Director, Oklahoma City VA Health Care System
921 Northeast 13th Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73104

Director Vlosich:

Thank you for your continued leadership of the Oklahoma City VA Health Care System. Your dedication and devotion to our veterans is remarkable.

As you know, a USA Today article in December of 2015 brought to light severe deficiencies of our Oklahoma VA facilities. Since that time, we have successfully worked together to ensure that our veterans have access to high-quality, effective health care, and have enacted meaningful reforms that allow outside oversight, the ability to fire poorly performing employees and expand health care choices for our veterans. I am proud of the work that we have done together in the last two years to improve veteran care in the state, but the work does not stop there.

As the Director of the Oklahoma City VA Health Care System, I request that you provide a plan and timeline to bring the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center from its current 3-star rating to a 5-star rating, including any resources that you may need to do so. This will provide the information needed to the administration and Congress to support regional directors to improve on all of the great work that has been done. We are eager to provide our veterans with high-quality care because they deserve nothing less.

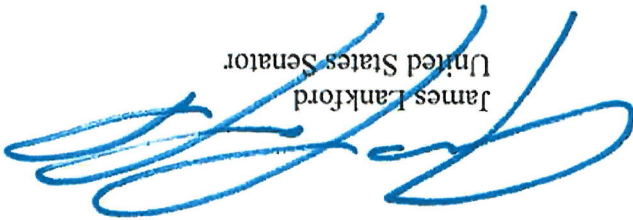
Again, thank you for all of the work you do for our veterans. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at 202-224-4721. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Markwayne Mullin

Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress

Steve Russell

Steve Russell
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2018

Mark Morgan
Director, Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System
1011 Honor Heights Drive
Muskogee, OK 74401

Director Morgan:

Thank you for your continued leadership of the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System. Your dedication and devotion to our veterans is greatly appreciated.

A *USA Today* article in December 2015 brought to light severe deficiencies in our Oklahoma Veterans Affairs facilities. Since that time, we have successfully worked together to ensure that our veterans have access to high-quality, effective health care, and have enacted meaningful reforms that allow outside oversight, the ability to fire poorly performing employees and expand health care choices for our veterans. I am proud of the work that we have done together in the last two years to improve veteran care in the state, but the work does not stop there.

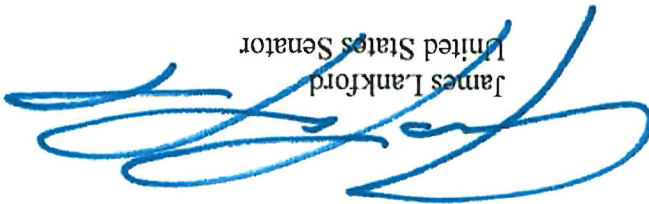
As the Director of the Eastern Oklahoma VA Health Care System, I request that you provide a plan and timeline to bring the Muskogee VA Medical Center from its current 2-star rating to a 5-star rating, including any resources that you may need to do so. This will provide the information needed to the administration and Congress to support regional directors to improve on all of the great work that has been done. We are eager to provide our veterans with high-quality care because they deserve nothing less.

Again, thank you for all of the work you do for our veterans. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at 202-224-4721. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator

Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress

Steve Russell
Member of Congress

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S.

To require directors of medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit plans to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve such facilities, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. INTROFF introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To require directors of medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit plans to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on how to improve such facilities, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*
3 **SECTION 1. PLANS TO IMPROVE MEDICAL FACILITIES OF**
4 **THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

5 (a) PLAN REQUIRED.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
7 Affairs shall require each director of a medical facil-
8 ity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit

1 to the Secretary, not later than 90 days after the
2 date of the enactment of this Act, a plan to improve
3 such facility in such a fashion as would result in the
4 facility obtaining a Department five-star rating.

5 (2) CONTENTS.—The Secretary shall ensure
6 that each plan submitted under paragraph (1) in-
7 cludes sufficient detail regarding resources, per-
8 sonnel changes, hiring authorities, additional staff-
9 ing, and changes to information systems as is ne-
10 cessary to obtain the rating described in such para-
11 graph.

12 (b) ANNUAL REPORTS.—The Secretary shall ensure
13 that, in the first fiscal year beginning after the date that
14 is 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act and
15 not less frequently than once each fiscal year thereafter,
16 each director of a medical facility of the Department which
17 does not have a Department five-star rating submits to
18 the Secretary a report on the actions taken by the director
19 to carry out the plan submitted by the director under sub-
20 section (a)(1) and to obtain the rating described in such
21 subsection.

22 (c) SENSE OF CONGRESS ON USE OF AUTHORITIES
23 TO INVESTIGATE MEDICAL CENTERS OF THE DEPART-
24 MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.—It is the sense of Con-
25 gress that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs should make

1 full use of the authorities provided by section 2 of the En-
2 hancing Veteran Care Act (Public Law 115-95).



James M. Inhofe
U.S. SENATOR * OKLAHOMA



www.inhofe.senate.gov

THE TULSA WORLD: Veterans Administration reforms will help assure the care and benefits veterans deserve

By U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe November 11, 2017

TULSA WORLD

There is no better way to honor our nation's veterans than by ensuring they get the care and benefits they earned in service to our country.

Sadly, that hasn't always been the case. Nearly two years ago, a USA Today article detailed the appalling standards of care at the Oklahoma Veterans Affairs facilities. It identified what dozens of inspector general reports from the Obama administration failed to reveal — that our veterans weren't getting the care they deserved and our VA facilities weren't being held to the highest standards. My reaction was visceral: This isn't how we take care of our veterans in Oklahoma. I got to work, talking to regional VA leadership, veterans and whistleblowers and identified three key problems.

- First, the VA couldn't fire bad employees. Many VA employees are dedicated public servants, but, unfortunately, there are bad actors that do not adhere to the highest standards of care. Yet, despite having been identified as poor performing individuals, they couldn't be fired or terminated from their positions.

We fixed that this summer when President Trump signed the VA Accountability Act that included language I worked on to allow the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to fire employees for misconduct or poor performance. President Trump's administration has used this authority to fire over 500 bad actors from the VA. We're finally creating a culture of accountability at the VA — which has led to positive improvements.

- Next, too many veterans were forced to receive care from VA facilities that were hours away or didn't provide the specialized care they needed. Our veterans deserve a choice in their doctor, hospital or other treatment facility. I worked with the president to reauthorize the bipartisan VA Choice program earlier this year to ensure veterans have access to high-quality health care of their choice.

- Finally, after the USA Today article, I demanded an accredited third-party look into the problems at our VA facilities because previous reports from Obama's Veterans Affairs' inspector general failed to identify fully and correct the problems. My request was denied, so I blocked the Senate's confirmation of the inspector general until he agreed to allow an outside entity investigate our VA facilities. But that was a one-time authority. Our regional VA directors, VISN directors and medical center directors should have the permanent authority to request outside oversight to ensure that their VA facilities are held to the same standards as private hospitals.

This Veterans Day, I'm pleased to announce that my legislation providing this critical oversight authority has passed the Senate. I look forward to working with Congressman Markwayne Mullin, who has introduced similar legislation in the House of Representatives, to enact this reform into law.

All of the reforms I have fought for helped Oklahoma turn the corner to improve how we treat our veterans, but more work remains. I'm going to keep fighting to ensure that Oklahoma leads the nation in providing the best health care for our veterans and ensure that our VA facilities receive a five-star rating. It's what they have earned.

Jim Inhofe, a Republican, is Oklahoma's senior U.S. senator.