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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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September 13, 2016

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Ranking Member Pallone,

I write to you today to urge immediate consideration of my legislation to address staffing shortages at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facilities across the country. Last year I introduced the bipartisan Veterans Access to Care Act, which would address staffing shortages by designating VA medical facilities as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), which would allow these sites to compete for National Health Service Corps fellows.

Again over the last few weeks we have seen the consequences of staffing shortages at VA facilities in Wisconsin. A recent report outlined a number of concerning allegation of poor care, deteriorating facility conditions, and staffing shortages at the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King. Although the facility is operated by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides oversight and funding for state veterans homes.

Additionally recruitment and staffing issues have been an ongoing problem at the Tomah VA Medical Center. Last October the Acute Psychiatric Inpatient Services Unit at Tomah was temporarily closed due to staffing shortages. The VA was forced to transfer veterans to other inpatient facilities across the state until the unit finally reopened in July 2016.

My bipartisan bill, H.R. 3639, the Veterans Access to Care Act, would designate VA medical facilities as HPSAs. By making this designation, it would allow these sites to compete for National Health Service Corps fellows, which is a program that pays student loan repayment or gives scholarships to doctors, dentists, mental health professionals, nurses, or medical students who pledge to practice in a HPSA for at least two years. This bill would go a long way toward addressing staffing shortages at the VA and state veterans homes throughout the country. I urge you to immediately consider H.R. 3639 in the Energy and Commerce Committee and push for a vote on the House floor as soon as possible.

I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Ron Kind
Member of Congress

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