MESSAGE FROM VA'S SECRETARY

THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

January 16, 2026



When President Trump nominated me to be Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA or the Department), he provided a very clear charge. He said, "I want you to take great care of our Veterans." In the first year of this Administration, I am proud to report that VA is implementing key reforms towards fulfilling the mission President Trump presented to me. VA's fiscal year (FY) 2025 Agency Financial Report (AFR) reflects our commitment to fiscal transparency and responsibility as we transition to my Veterans First strategy. Too often in the past, VA wasted taxpayer dollars on non-mission-critical programs. Those days are over. Today at VA, the Veteran is at the center of everything we do. The Veteran is the mission.

Part of putting Veterans first is finding new and better ways to do our jobs and focus our resources. VA reduced total staff by 30,000 in FY 2025. By eliminating layers of bureaucracy, we can improve our service delivery to Veterans. We have eliminated divisive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies saving $14 million in taxpayer funding. Through the cancellation of wasteful contracts, grants, and leases, VA redirected $900 million away from programs and initiatives that do not directly benefit the Veterans we are privileged to serve.

By all measures, VA's FY 2025 was historic. We reached an all-time high of over 3 million disability rating claims issued. The backlog of Veterans waiting for VA benefits dropped by 43%. We improved our physical footprint by opening 16 new health care clinics across the country and invested over $800 million in infrastructure improvements to ensure VA facilities are safe and provide state-of-the-art patient care. We also delivered earned care and benefits quicker and easier than ever before. We made major reforms in how eligible survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and Service members apply for, and receive, VA benefits and services. We eliminated barriers for VA-enrolled Veterans to access care from non-VA providers at the Department's expense. And finally, VA offered Veterans nearly 1 million appointments outside of normal operating hours, giving Veterans more timely and convenient options for care that fits VA into their lives, rather than the other way around.

Amid all this progress on behalf of Veterans, I am pleased to announce that the Department received its 27th consecutive unmodified audit opinion from the independent public accounting firm, Kearney & Company, for the FY 2025 financial statement audit. This audit signifies that VA's financial statements are fairly presented in all material respects and demonstrates our commitment to transparency and exceptional fiscal stewardship. We remain focused on addressing any material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, and noncompliance identified, with detailed remediation efforts outlined in the Management's Statement of Assurance on page 17 of this AFR.

However, our work is far from finished. I look forward to working with our dedicated VA staff and external partners to continue making historic reforms refocusing the Department on its core mission: providing the best possible care and services to Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors.

Sincerely,

(/s/) Douglas A. Collins