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ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS
 B-234 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
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<http://veterans.house.gov>

December 10, 2019

The Honorable Mark Esper
 Secretary
 Department of Defense
 1400 Defense Blvd
 Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
 Secretary
 Department of State
 2201 C St. NW
 Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
 Secretary
 Department of Veterans Affairs
 810 Vermont Ave., NW
 Washington, D.C. 20571

Dear Secretary Esper, Secretary Pompeo, and Secretary Wilkie:

We recently visited the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan during our Thanksgiving congressional delegation overseas. There, we hosted a roundtable where we heard from veterans currently working as contractors through the U.S. Department of State. They described the difficulty they experienced navigating the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability claims process while abroad. As government contractors stationed outside the U.S., these veterans are unable to attend a stateside VA disability examination, leading to delays and denials of benefits. Through no fault of their own, these veterans are often unable to access benefits.

We believe VA's contract disability examination program could provide a solution to this problem. Presently, VA utilizes contractors to conduct disability examinations for veterans living both within the U.S. and overseas. Though the framework to perform overseas examinations already exists, veterans working as government contractors in areas of military conflict are excluded from those resources. Because a contract disability examination program already exists in various locations abroad, we believe this program could eliminate geographical barriers to benefits for these veterans.

We are eager to reach a prompt resolution to this issue. Please advise as to the feasibility of extending VA's contract disability examination program to government contractors stationed in areas of ongoing armed conflict before February 1, 2020. We look forward to your response and partnering with you to resolve this issue.

Sincerely,

Mark Takano
 Chairman

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 Member of Congress

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 Member of Congress

Colin Allred
 Member of Congress

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 Member of Congress