



State-Tribal Relations Committee

PO BOX 201706
Helena, MT 59620-1706
(406) 444-3064
FAX (406) 444-3036

62nd Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

SHANNON ALIGARF
TAYLOR BROWN
CARMINE MOWBRAY
SHARON STEWART-PFERGOY

HOUSE MEMBERS

GORDON HENDRICK
CAROLYN PFASER-LOPEZ
JOE READ
FRANK SMITH

COMMITTEE STAFF

CASEY BARRS, Lead Staff
DANIEL WHYTE, Staff Attorney
CLAUDIA (C.I.) JOHNSON, Secretary

September 7, 2012

The Honorable Max Baucus
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

Through its joint meetings with tribal councils in Montana's Indian country as well as through testimony heard in Helena, the State-Tribal Relations Committee of the interim legislature has become impressed with the efforts underway to provide transportation for Indian veterans and other veterans facing the challenges of distance or mobility.

As you know, the VA Health Care Administration launched the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) Program in early 2012, and the VA's partner in that effort is the Disabled American Veterans' Department of Montana. The VTS Program is a humble yet vital service for the men and women who once wore the uniform of our country and did so much in the service of their fellow citizens.

Our committee is concerned on two counts. One is that the VTS Program might not be materializing as quickly as it could. And the other is that our veterans are sometimes required to travel to facilities quite distant in Montana when comparable facilities far closer to home exist across the border in a neighboring state. Given the size of Montana, you can imagine the stress this puts on veterans who find movement difficult and you can also appreciate the savings in time and expense that could result if they simply were transported to a facility much closer but in a neighboring state.

Therefore, with this letter the State-tribal Relations Committee would respectfully like to urge your office to consider and pursue the following:

- (1) Support whatever measures are necessary to expedite the purchase, upgrading (for wheelchair access), and deployment of the vans needed for full actualization of the VTS Program.
- (2) It appears that our veterans cannot be transported across a state border to a closer facility unless they can obtain travel authorization from the VTS Program Coordinator—and then only to a VA medical services facility with a confirmed medical appointment. Therefore, please support any measures necessary to make it easier for veterans to obtain travel authorization for confirmed



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medical appointments—as well as non-medical services—across the state’s borders.

We know you share our concern for the Indian and non-Indian veterans who face such transportation challenges. Please consider our committee's bipartisan request for the support described here.

Most Sincerely,

Senator Carmine Mowbray
Chairman
State-Tribal Relations Committee
Legislature of Montana