

Committee leaders lay out their priorities for veterans in the 117th Congress

After years of fighting to deliver quality care and benefits to the nation's men and women in uniform, Sen. Jon Tester of Montana took over the gavel as chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee in January. Tester's first hearing as chairman was to consider the President's nomination of Denis McDonough to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Previous chairman Sen. Jerry Moran of Kansas now serves as ranking member of the committee.

"Serving as Chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee is an honor of a lifetime, and I'm grateful for the chance to lead the committee on behalf of Montana's veterans and all who've served our nation proudly," Tester said in a press release the day prior to taking over as chairman. "I'm looking forward to continuing the bipartisan partnership Senator Moran and I have built, and am ready to roll up my sleeves along with our committee members and veterans advocates to hold the VA accountable, cut red tape, and provide quality care and benefits to those who've sacrificed on behalf of our freedoms.

"Taking care of our veterans is a continuing cost of war, and I'm prepared to get to work in this new role to ensure Congress follows through on this sacred duty."

"Senator Tester has been an unyielding champion for our nation's veterans, helping to advance legislation to reform VA health care, improve programs for caregivers and women veterans, and ensure veterans exposed to toxic substances receive the benefits they deserve, among many other critical issues," said National Commander Butch Whitehead. "DAV congratulates him on his chairmanship, and we look forward to

working with him and Senator Moran in the continued bipartisan spirit of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee."

In the other chamber of the Capitol, Rep. Mark Takano of California continues serving in his role as chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs during the 117th Congress.

In a January op-ed published in *Military Times*, Takano said Secretary McDonough's first priority should be "taking the necessary steps to repair and rebuild the trust of veterans and the VA employees that serve them." He also said the secretary must recognize the extraordinary diversity and uplift the voices of all veterans—including women, LGBTQ+, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and Native veterans—so they know they have a place at VA.

"Cultural change starts at the top," Takano wrote. "I look forward to working with Secretary-designate McDonough to ensure that VA cares for and supports all veterans who walk through its facilities and empowers its workforce. All veterans should feel welcome, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or race. Any veteran with toxic exposure should have access to VA. We must continue to work to meaningfully address veteran suicide."