

STATE-TRIBAL RELATIONS IC
SEPTEMBER 7, 2012
Exhibit 8

Recommended Additions to the Chair Person Letter
to our Congressman and Representative for Montana:

Under (1);

All Vans must be fully handicap assessable, to include fully trained Driver/Operator qualified, they must be co-located very near or on each Reservation in the State. Also the drivers must be fully funded paid federal VA Employees.

We recommend that the Computer program, called Route Match be expanded to take care of tracking Maintenance for Every Van in the State, both Voluntary Transportation Network from the D.A.V. and the Veterans Transportation Service through the federal VA. Currently it does not. Also the Route program must work hand in hand with federal VA Scheduling so that Vans from the far eastern part of the state do not make extra runs from Glasgow as an example to Fort Harrison, in other words if you have two appointments from two different veterans for the same thing or at the same location make sure there on the same day, Saves money, Volunteer time, usage of the vehicles.

First and foremost this needs to be done yesterday, we have been told various Suspense dates and they have all passed. The reason for this is the VTN Fleet down about 8 vans for maintenance and rotation out of the system. Our fleet is getting old and the demand is growing, so who suffers the Veteran and there Family!

Under (2);

The VA has long had issues that a Veteran cannot travel across state lines unless they have an agreement setup to serve veterans within their area. Example Libby can travel to Spokane but Sidney cannot travel to Into North Dakota or South Dakota. Why, we haul Veterans from across the State to Wyoming for Chemical Treatment. Veterans are suppose to have a choice of Doctor, Why are they being denied treatment of a location of choice when its reasonable and easier on the loved ones that they rely on to take them or the VTN or VTS to get them to that location that is much closer.

Last during Congress 3 years ago we asked for Grant Assistance through Congress for Van purchasing assistance, Training for the VTN Drivers and Local Area Coordinators, and small administrative costs. **The Rural Health Care Act was introduced by our Congressman from Montana it was passed approving \$50K per State** for just such a purpose. It was to be made available for Veterans Service organizations to apply for the Grant through the Local VA Facility. To date 3 years have passed, a possible \$150,000 that could have been utilized by the VTN for the purposes above. **None of that money has been received**

In summary our situation for transporting all Veterans in Montana is getting very critical because of a shrinking Fleet, delays in deployments of programs and increasing demand. Who Suffers, The Veterans and Families of those who are in the situation there in trying to protect all of us.



State-Tribal Relations Committee

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62nd Montana Legislature

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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.

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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