



**State-Tribal Relations Committee**  
**62nd Montana Legislature**

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December 27, 2012

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

Dear Senator Baucus:

The State-Tribal Relations Committee is the primary liaison between the Legislature of Montana and the sovereign tribal governments situated within the state. During our legislature's 2011-2012 interim, the STR committee examined the issue of veterans' access to transportation. Our committee became impressed with the efforts underway to provide transportation for Indian veterans and other veterans facing the challenges of distance or mobility.

That said, concerns were presented to our committee both during its visit to the Fort Peck Reservation in April 2012 as well as in subsequent testimony heard during the Summer and Fall of 2012.

The VA Health Care Administration launched the Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) Program in October 2011, and the VA's partner in that effort is the Disabled American Veterans' Department of Montana. The VTS Program is a simple 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 developing as quickly and qualitatively as it could. And the other is that our veterans are sometimes required to travel to facilities quite distant in Montana—even when comparable facilities far closer to home exist across the border in a neighboring state. Given the size of Montana, this can put great stress on veterans, and the families of veterans, who find movement difficult. Clearly they would save considerable time and expense if they simply were transported to a facility much closer but in a neighboring state.

Therefore, with this letter the State-Tribal Relations Committee respectfully urges your office to consider and pursue the following:

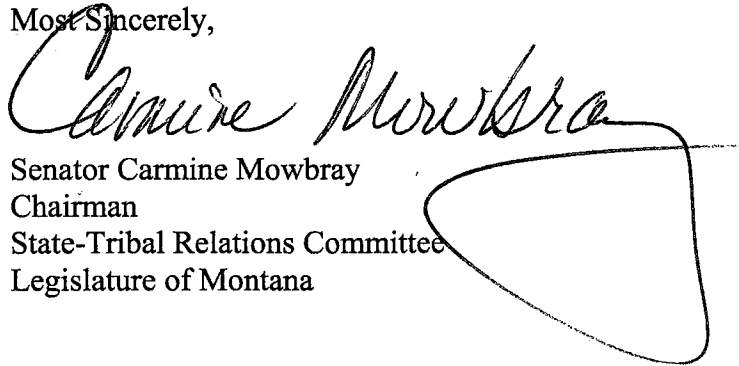
1. Support whatever measures are necessary to expedite the purchase, upgrading, and deployment of the vans needed for full actualization of the VTS Program. Specifically, our committee feels it is important that all the vans be fully handicap accessible and that the drivers within the VTS Program be trained to become driver/operator qualified and be fully paid as federal VA employees. We also believe an expansion of the *Route Match*

computer program would result in improved efficiency and maintenance tracking. Lastly, the VTS Program would perhaps have developed as quickly and qualitatively as originally intended if the funding earmarked for it under The Rural Health Care Act had actually been allocated over the past three years. This is an unfortunate lapse that we hope your office can look into.

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 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 support of the VTS Program described here.

Most Sincerely,



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

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