

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 17, 2018

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
412 Russell Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Isakson,

We write to respectfully request you schedule a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee oversight hearing regarding reports of ongoing inappropriate influence on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by three members of President Trump's private club, Mar-a-Lago.

Reportedly, Ike Perlmutter, Marc Sherman, and Bruce Moskowitz have weighed in behind the scenes on a host of personnel and policy issues. None of the members of this so-called "Mar-a-Lago crowd" has any experience in the U.S. government or military and they are operating without any transparency, accountability, or oversight. In addition, while they claim to only be providing advisory information, reporting by ProPublica and the New York Times indicates that this is not the case and that they were not only influencing, but directing, various activities at the VA.

Of particular concern, is that these unofficial advisers are allegedly using their influence to push for privatization of the VA. In his confirmation hearing, Secretary Robert Wilkie vowed not to privatize the VA and recognized the importance of investing in the Department's internal capacity so VA can continue to provide high-quality care to our veterans.

The recent revelations, which are deeply troubling, are not the first we've heard about this inappropriate outsourcing of VA decision-making. Many of us previously expressed concerns about the trio's influence earlier this year when it was reported that they had been pushing to delay the VA's electronic health record modernization (EHR). We asked for information about the VA's contact with Dr. Moskowitz and any other individual outside the VA who provided input on EHR modernization. To date, we have not received such information.

Given the most recent reports regarding the trio's role in pushing out former Secretary Shulkin, supporting the marginalizing of career staff by political leaders they had hand-picked, and other attempts at influencing decisions, we respectfully request an oversight hearing to get to the bottom of these allegations. With the many challenges facing the VA, public accountability and transparency of this department is critical.

While many of the reported incidents occurred prior to now-Secretary Wilkie's tenure at the VA, it is imperative that we receive his testimony about his interactions and communications with the trio and what actions he has taken and what actions he plans to take to ensure decisions at the

VA are being driven by what is best for our veterans without undue outside influence or direction. Therefore, we respectfully request that he, relevant career staff, and others be called to testify on these matters.

We appreciate your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to ensure the VA is acting with the best interest of our veterans in mind.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator