

June 10, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins

Secretary of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue,

NW Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Collins,

I write to follow up on my February 2025 letter about the reckless termination of contracts by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). To date, the VA has terminated upwards of 655 contracts, including the contract for the VA’s cancer registry database services in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Alaska. This database is key to spotting trends across cancer patients, and allows our medical community to develop better guidelines to diagnose, treat, and beat cancer. Cancelling this contract is mindless and cruel in equal measure for America’s veterans who deserve far better in return for their service to our country. The VA must use every tool at its disposal to support our veterans battling cancer, and I call on the VA to reinstate this contract immediately.

Approximately two million cases of cancer are likely to be diagnosed in the United States this year alone, and our veterans experience certain types of cancer at higher rates than the general population due to toxic exposures in military service. In fact, more than 16% of new cancer diagnoses in veterans are rare cancers, and more than 450,000 veterans are receiving cancer care at a VA hospital or facility.

Cancer registries allow our nation’s medical experts to analyze data on cancer patients and survivors to determine how effective our nation is in fighting cancer, where additional health resources are needed, and what experts still need to research and understand about cancer. Cancer registries have shaped our medical screening practices, which has allowed for early detection of breast, cervical, colorectal, and lung cancers in veterans and Americans broadly. Unfortunately, for years, the VA lacked an organized approach to sharing data with state and national registries to advance our collective fight against cancer. With support from veterans organizations nationwide, Congress sought to address these issues by directing the VA to increase reporting and collaboration with states through the fiscal year 2024 appropriations bills, which was enacted with my support.

The contractor you have terminated so rashly was responsible for the monthly review of disease and pathology reports, radiology reports, treatment logs, and other computerized methods to identify reportable cancer cases. By terminating this contract, you have prevented the VA cancer registry from reporting accurate and timely data that would help cancer surveillance and shape our medical community’s response to veterans battling cancer. Interruptions in data collection and reporting will delay our medical community’s ability to recognize emerging cancer trends and treatment gaps, which will worsen outcomes for veterans and Americans battling cancer nationwide.

I am further alarmed by ProPublica’s reporting from June 6, 2025, that suggests the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, developed and applied an artificial intelligence (AI) tool to identify which VA services were not essential. The ProPublica report indicates DOGE named these contracts “MUNCHABLE” and the DOGE AI tool flagged more than 2,000 VA contracts for “munching.” According to a former DOGE official cited by ProPublica, DOGE used AI models that were not designed to vet federal contracts. Predictably, these tools produced results with serious mistakes, including cancelling valuable services for veterans. For example, it appears the “munchable” tool only seeks to spare VA contracts involved in “direct patient care,” but fails to recognize the work done by contractors who provide significant support to make direct care possible—contracts like the one pertaining to the Cancer Registry Services for the Northwest U.S. and Alaska VA Facilities. The VA uses contractors for many critical reasons, such as supporting hospitals, medical research, and services that provide care for ailing veterans. DOGE employees have no understanding of how the VA handles veterans’ care and indeed the former DOGE employee who designed the AI tool acknowledged that “mistakes were made” with the VA’s termination of contracts based on DOGE’s vetting of contracts.

I have fought tooth and nail over my career to enact several laws to expand veterans healthcare, including the one that led to maintaining cancer registry services by the VA. I am appalled to hear the VA has callously terminated this and other contracts, and possibly at the recommendation of an AI tool developed by DOGE employees who have no understanding of the VA’s functions and services. Veterans in Oregon and across the country deserve quality healthcare, which includes comprehensive cancer encompassing cancer research, clinical trials, and specialized treatment.

I urge you to reinstate the contract for Cancer Registry Services for the Northwest U.S. and Alaska VA Facilities, so our nation can advance the fight against cancer and provide quality cancer care for our veterans.

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden

United States Senator