

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Works to protect VA watchdog

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin worked to protect the mission of the VA Inspector General (IG), the independent watchdog tasked with investigating misconduct and waste of taxpayer dollars at the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA).

Senator Baldwin cosponsored a bipartisan amendment, led by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), that was included in the 2019 VA funding bill to ensure that the IG can investigate, audit and conduct oversight of the nation's largest health care system without being hindered by political delays, non-cooperation and stall tactics by the VA. The amendment comes after VA leaders recently refused to comply with the IG's request for information. The Senate approved the amendment with a vote of 96-0.

"We must deliver on our promise to veterans that their VA care and services are protected. That is why the VA Inspector General needs the resources and independence to carry out their oversight responsibilities and make sure the VA is doing right by our veterans and their families," said Senator Baldwin. "This amendment ensures that we are holding the VA accountable so our veterans and their families receive the care and services that they deserve."

Additional cosponsors of the amendment include Senators Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Claire McCaskill (D-MO), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Joe Manchin (D-WV), Richard

Blumenthal (D-CT), Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Angus King (I-ME), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Doug Jones (D-AL).

The Senate amendment reads as follows:

- (a) None of the funds made available in this Act may be used to deny an Inspector General funded under this Act timely access to any records, documents, or other materials available to the department or agency over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), or to prevent or impede that Inspector General's access to such records, documents, or other materials, under any provision of law, except a provision of law that expressly refers to the Inspector General and expressly limits the Inspector General's right of access.
- (b) A department or agency covered by this section shall provide its Inspector General with access to all such records, documents, and other materials in a timely manner.
- (c) Each Inspector General shall ensure compliance with statutory limitations on disclosure relevant to the information provided by the establishment over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.).
- (d) Each Inspector General covered by this section shall report to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate within 5 calendar days any failures to comply with this requirement.