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## Trump is Wrong About Tester and Montana's Veterans



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Late last week President Trump blasted Montana's senior U.S. Sen. Jon Tester for releasing damaging information on Ronnie Jackson, Trump's personal physician and his nominee to head the massive Veterans Administration. Jon Tester might lose his bid for re-election, just like any other politician, but it will not be because Montana's veterans turn on the man who has done as much or more for vets than any person Montanans ever sent to Congress.

As the ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Tester has been an absolute bulldog on dealing with the problems at the Veterans Administration. Considering the VA has about 378,000 employees and a \$180 billion budget, Tester's concern with vetting Trump's nominee is exactly what a senator should do.

For one thing, Congress is a separate branch of government, which Trump doesn't seem to understand. The function of Congress, besides making law and appropriating funds to run the government, is to provide the checks and balances on the executive and judicial branches of government. It's very unfortunate that we have a president who has no idea about why our Constitution ensures "separate but equal" branches of government, but Congress is not and never was expected to be a rubber stamp for whatever a president wants to do.

Given the content of the material Tester released about Jackson, it's no wonder he was concerned. Although they preferred to remain anonymous because they feared the vindictive retribution so common in the Trump administration for those who don't go along with whatever dictates spill from the dysfunctional Oval Office, the revelations about Jackson from service members were damning.

Besides having exactly zero experience managing a massive federal agency, Jackson was apparently known as "Candyman" due to the prescription drugs he "loosely" handed out to co-workers without proper paperwork. And then there were the accusations, as The Hill reported, that Jackson "wrote prescriptions that other doctors would not authorize, had an explosive temper, bullied colleagues, exhibited drunkenness while on duty and once wrecked a government vehicle while intoxicated."

Although Trump threatened Tester that he "has a big price to pay," remember that Trump knows as much about Montana and Montanans as he knows about the Constitution, which is virtually nothing.

One might also wonder why Jackson voluntarily withdrew his nomination. The answer to that is equally simple: Republicans, as well as Tester, did not believe he was the right person to head the VA for many good reasons. Or as they say in the political arena, "he didn't have the votes."

Unlike Trump, Tester has actually accomplished a great deal for veterans, including allowing vets to see local doctors instead of having to travel long distances across our huge state to access VA facilities. Speaking of which, you can bet Montana's vets appreciate Tester's successful effort to obtain \$8 million to build the long-sought Butte veterans' facility.

Even Republican Chuck Hagel, former Secretary of Defense under Presidents Reagan and Obama, found Trump's threats "outrageous," saying, "this phony charge that Tester has gotten from the president and others that this is politics is just nonsense." While Republican Russ Fagg, who is running to unseat Tester, jumped on that nonsensical bandwagon claiming Tester would "say anything to get re-elected," Montana's 92,377 veterans are likely to agree with Hagel that "Jon Tester handled this the right way."

As his scandal-ridden presidency continues to unravel, the one who may actually have the biggest "price to pay" come November will be Trump when he loses the compliant Republican majorities in the Senate and/or House.