

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2014

The Honorable Robert McDonald
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

As you know, Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson recently visited South Louisiana veterans at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Lafayette, Louisiana. During his visit, Deputy Secretary Gibson remarked that the conditions at the Lafayette CBOC are “inadequate and unacceptable.” We agree. Unfortunately, this has long been the reality in South Louisiana. We want to work with you to turn this legacy around.

Our veterans have long been subject to scarcity of adequate care, waiting years for two long-promised CBOCs to become a reality, a larger CBOC in Lafayette, and a new CBOC in Lake Charles. In early 2012, after a bureaucratic error by the VA, authorization for these clinics fell through and the process was forced to begin all over again. Last August, Congress acted to reauthorize these clinics as part of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014. We were told the initial contracts would be awarded in late February 2015, a deadline that has now passed. Additionally, we were told the original construction deadlines provided by your organization will be delayed nearly a year for both the Lafayette and Lake Charles facilities, further frustrating our local veterans. This frustration was communicated to Deputy Secretary Gibson during his visit to our state.

We are grateful Deputy Secretary Gibson visited Lafayette and New Orleans during his time in Louisiana, but significant problems persist elsewhere in the state as well. While he was unable to travel to Lake Charles during his trip, we cannot express strongly enough the immediate needs of this area. You should be aware that veterans in this area are currently served by a mobile VA clinic. Surely the fact that conditions at the Lafayette facility are “inadequate and unacceptable” clarifies how great the need is for a permanent CBOC in Lake Charles, as well as in Lafayette.

While our veterans wait for new facilities, we believe it is necessary for these communities to have increased access to care through temporary additional clinic space promised to them by the VA. Staff from the Alexandria VA Health Care System met with Lake Charles stakeholders to discuss this matter last year, and Deputy Secretary Gibson announced the additional space to the Lafayette community when he visited in February. Veterans in both Lafayette and Lake Charles have explored properties with the potential to house these temporary additional facilities and have been in contact with VA staff to accomplish this goal. Please provide us with a progress report explaining the status of this additional space.

Additionally, we wanted to make you aware that veterans in the Lake Charles community are beginning to worry their CBOC will be delayed past March 2015. This would be absolutely unacceptable, especially considering both leases were originally supposed to be awarded in February 2015.

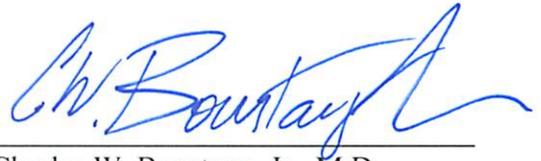
Lack of communication from the VA is an issue we have raised with your office multiple times in the past. Now, your Agency's lack of communication is stoking fears that more delays may be in the works that local veterans are not aware of. We believe this situation highlights why your Agency must do a better job of communicating with our offices and with the veterans you are charged to serve. We request an expedited report on all information you are able to provide regarding the status of the Lake Charles CBOC. We also ask that you pay close attention to the progress of each facility and do all in your power to expedite the Lafayette and Lake Charles clinics whenever possible.

We have worked tirelessly to secure these desperately-needed facilities, and are wholly invested in ensuring nothing jeopardizes their completion. South Louisiana veterans have waited years for the care they need and deserve, and it is time for the VA to follow through on the promises made to those who have sacrificed so much for our country. We look forward to your expedited response.

Sincerely,



David Vitter
United States Senator



Charles W. Boustany, Jr., M.D.
Member of Congress