

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 17, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Reid, Mr. McConnell, Mr. Boehner, and Ms. Pelosi:

We write to respectfully ask House and Senate Leadership to make an explicit decision to resolve a growing veterans' access problem harming more than 340,000 veterans in 22 states.

Congress has worked to improve local medical access for veterans by authorizing and supporting more than 800 community-based clinics through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) since the 1990s. These are important facilities for the convenient, cost-effective primary care for millions of veterans. Unfortunately a sudden policy shift by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has put the future Congressional authorization of more than 38 VA leases for major medical facilities on an indefinite hold.

In September 2012, CBO suddenly announced it would redefine these VA leases as capital, rather than operating, leases and treat them as current-year mandatory spending of more than \$1 billion. Lawmakers removed the leases from the House annual construction and extenders package bill before it became law because House rules would have forced an offset for the leases with an unrealistic \$1 billion cut to mandatory veterans' programs in a single year — an impossible task that would seriously harm existing services for our veterans.

This unexpected challenge won't resolve itself absent a decision from House and Senate leadership on whether Congress will continue to authorize new construction of local VA community-based outpatient clinics and other needed facilities. Without decisive action by House and Senate Leadership, the VA warns existing leases will expire, clinics will close, and costs will increase as veterans travel further and wait longer for needed treatment.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) disagrees with CBO's new assessment of OMB's own lease definitions. According to OMB, "Based on the information VA provided, OMB assumes these leases will be *operating leases* provided they are structured consistent with the requirements contained in OMB circular A-11." Consistent with these requirements, the VA

argues new construction funded by these lease authorizations is similar to medical facilities in the private sector and there is a "private sector market for the asset."

According to Congressional Research Service (CRS) budget experts, House and Senate leaders have the power to break this log jam by agreeing to waive budget rules. We attach a pertinent CRS issue summary for your review, along with a VA list of lease requests.

Without an explicit decision on the fate of these promised clinics, the VA cannot adequately plan while working to meet the unique needs of veterans. Committee leaders with jurisdiction over the VA have pledged to solve this problem but the decision on Congressional budget rules falls on top leadership.

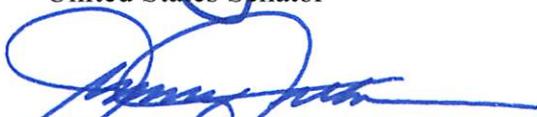
We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your decision.

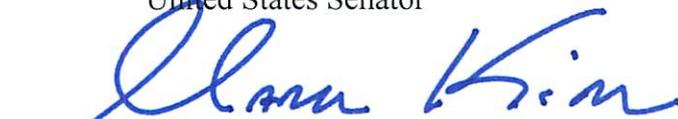
Sincerely,


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United States Senator


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United States Senator


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United States Senator


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United States Senator


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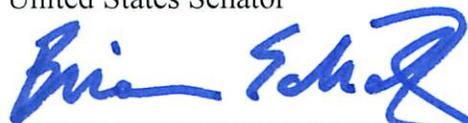

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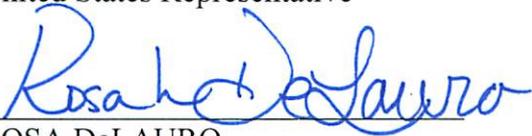

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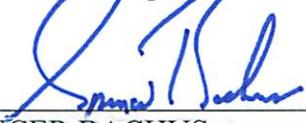

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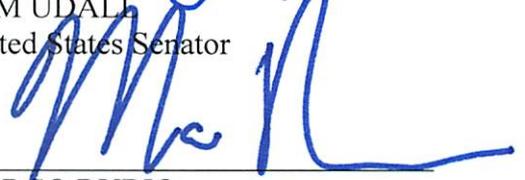

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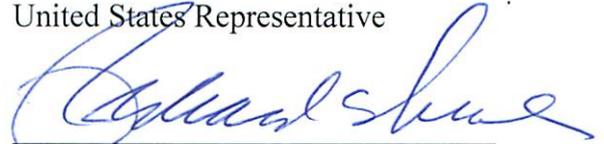

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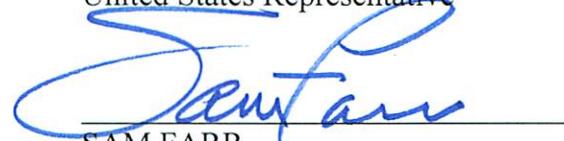

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RICHARD NEAL
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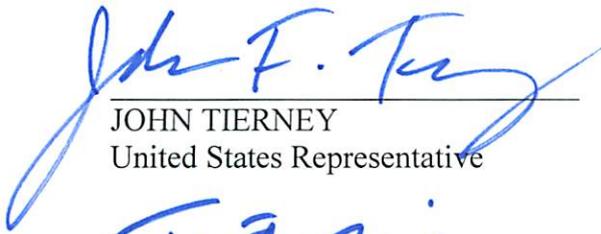

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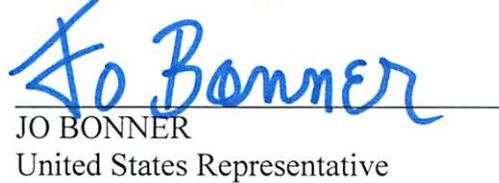

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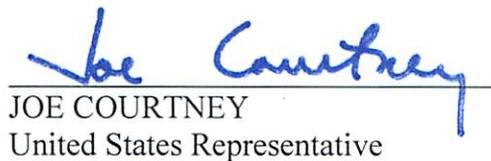
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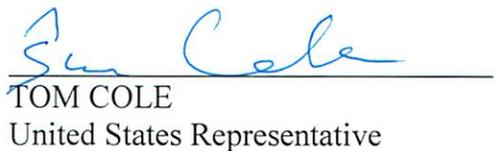
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RODNEY ALEXANDER
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MARSHA BLACKBURN
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TOM COLE
United States Representative



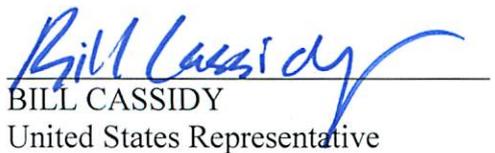
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