

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 22, 2016

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

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We write to express our extreme disappointment and concern that you are not fulfilling your commitment to join the South Dakota delegation in touring the Hot Springs hospital campus prior to making a final decision regarding the proposed consolidation of the Black Hills Health Care System.

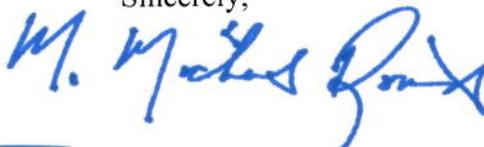
In our discussions with you dating back to before your confirmation as the eighth Secretary of Veterans Affairs, we have made clear our expectation that our veterans be given fair and open consideration in this matter. However, in the nearly five years since the VA first made public its desire to consolidate the Black Hills Health Care System, the process has not been sufficiently transparent or responsive to criticisms from veteran stakeholders. Failure to hold a constructive discussion about the Hot Springs campus with the South Dakota congressional delegation and veteran stakeholders, to include addressing the continued discrepancies in the VA's analysis, prior to issuing a final decision will all but confirm that a reduction in services at the Hot Springs VA has been a pre-determined outcome throughout this process. We are confident that the long-sought visit to the historic Hot Springs VA campus will be most productive if it includes meaningful engagement with the veteran community and the presence of the South Dakota delegation.

Given the magnitude of the changes the VA's proposed consolidation would have on veteran care, we request that you not hastily issue a final decision in the waning days of President Obama's administration. The uncertainty and distrust this process has sown in the veteran community can only be remedied by thoughtful and studied action. Furthermore, we also maintain that any reconfiguration sought by the VA should be made within the construct of a national realignment strategy for the Veterans Health Administration, as prescribed by law.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this urgent and important matter.

Sincerely,


JOHN THUNE
United States Senator


M. MICHAEL ROUNDS
United States Senator


KRISTI NOEM
Member of Congress