

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 22, 2022

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We look forward to your visit to New Mexico later this month. We trust you will enjoy traveling through the state and hearing from our veterans. Our state is rich in cultural and natural diversity. Many areas, though, lack sufficient health care services and thus require traveling great distances to receive care. This is why we continue to voice opposition to the recommended closures released in the Asset and Infrastructure Review report earlier this year. All four of the veteran health clinics, formally known as Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), recommended for closure in New Mexico are in rural parts of the state where these challenges apply. During your time in New Mexico, we urge you to visit the Las Vegas or Raton clinics, two of the four clinics that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recommended for closure.

Since the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission released its report, we traveled to these clinics to meet with veterans and listen to their concerns. As they have proudly shared stories of service to our country, they have also shared heartbreaking fears of losing access to care. During one of those visits, one veteran, Chris, said, "Congress is quick to send us to war, but when it comes to health care, the government is severely lacking." We also heard from family members of veterans who explained that over half of the veterans living in New Mexico are over 65 and rely on their loved ones to take time off work and help the veterans get to their appointments.

We understand that you plan to visit the Gallup veteran health clinic and we look forward to being there with you so you can hear directly from those veterans. However, we believe it is essential that you visit the clinics recommended for closure where the VA has not laid out an alternative plan for access. The Las Vegas and Raton veteran health clinics are two and three hours away from the main VA Health Center in Albuquerque. When severe weather forces closure of highways, veterans may be a day away from access to care.

The veterans who utilize these clinics specifically asked that you travel in their shoes so you can understand the distances they must travel, often while in pain because of their condition. We understand that the Las Vegas and Raton veteran health clinics would add a significant amount of time to your travel, but it is for that reason that we believe it is essential that you

understand the distance and topography of our state. These veterans are merely asking you to do what closure would do to them.

Thank you for considering this slight amendment to your schedule.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Martin Heinrich".

MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Ray Luján".

BEN RAY LUJÁN
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Teresa Leger Fernández".

TERESA LEGER FERNÁNDEZ
United States Representative

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melanie A. Stansbury".

MELANIE STANSBURY
United States Representative