

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 7, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

I am writing to request the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) assistance in demolishing buildings on the Miles City, Montana VA campus.

The Department is transitioning services at the Miles City VA Clinic and Community Living Center (CLC). VA will be establishing a new leased Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in a different part of Miles City and also leasing dedicated VA-controlled space within an existing nursing home or similar facility to care for the residents of the CLC. The Department has indicated the current VA buildings and infrastructure on the Miles City campus have reached the end of their suitable service life. VA has also shared that in the long term, a dedicated and standalone CLC will be established in Miles City. As such, I support the VA's decision to transition to new space as it is in the best interest of veterans and the employees that serve them.

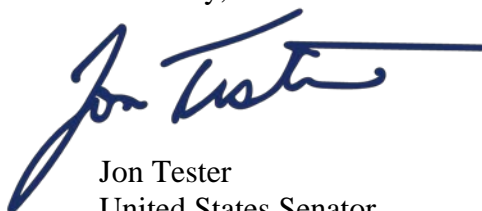
While I support the transition of services for veterans to other parts of Miles City, I am concerned by the potentially negative impact on the taxpayers of Miles City and Custer County who are being left to deal with the approximately 14.4 acres of campus land and buildings that sit in a flood plain. Custer County has a population of approximately 12,000 and a limited tax base. If the county were to take ownership of the Miles City campus or if it were to be sold or transferred to some other interested party, there remains significant work and resources required to prepare this land for reuse to benefit the county and its economy. Without appropriate coordination and investment, there is risk for this property to become blighted.

For this reason, I would like to request the following assistance from the Department. First, I would ask that the July 8, 2020 deadline set by VA for Custer County to decide whether they want to accept the Miles City Campus consistent with Public Law 106-419, be extended until VA is able to demolish the buildings on the campus. Second, I would request that VA use whatever available appropriate resources to demolish the buildings on the campus in coordination with the transition of veterans care services already underway. These actions will allow this property to be better prepared for future redevelopment, either by the county or some other party, and reduce the impact on Custer County taxpayers.

As the Department examines available funding for building demolition, I stand ready to assist. I recognize the importance of not negatively impacting existing construction, maintenance, and other projects already planned in Montana or elsewhere when securing these funds.

I appreciate your assistance in finding a fair solution to this long-standing property transfer effort that serves taxpayers and the Department.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jon Tester
United States Senator