

United States Senate

June 29, 2022

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

Dear Mr. Secretary,

Since joining the U.S. Senate in 2007, I have been proud to work with veterans, local communities, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to deliver numerous VA infrastructure projects across Montana that expand veterans' access to high quality health care and benefits.

While I am pleased with the progress we have made for veterans with these new and updated facilities, there is more work to be done. Specifically, several infrastructure projects in Montana require additional attention so they can open and serve veterans, and I ask for your assistance in accelerating their completion. We both know modern medical facilities, together with a strong VA workforce, are the cornerstone of veteran health care delivery. Each of these facilities will improve access to and quality of care.

The projects listed below are in different stages of development. While I recognize that each project has its own unique challenges, several of these efforts have already missed or moved key milestones and deadlines. I ask that you ensure the relevant contracting and other support offices in Montana, Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), and VA Central Office are appropriately staffed to manage the infrastructure workload for my state and nationally.

Miles City Community Living Center (CLC) – Minor Lease

VA Montana is working to secure a new minor lease to relocate the services of the Miles City CLC into a modern health care facility. I have long engaged with VA on this effort but am concerned about the slow pace of progress. This project is desperately needed because the current Miles City CLC is housed in infrastructure well beyond its service life for the delivery of high-quality health care and nursing home services. This is all the more critical because of the recent temporary closure of the Miles City CLC. While VA expects to re-open the existing CLC, a new lease facility is the best long-term solution for the region's veterans and the employees that care for them.

Hamilton Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) – Minor Lease

VA Montana is also finalizing the award of a replacement lease for the Hamilton CBOC. As of June 14, 2022, the award was being protested. Once that protest is resolved, I ask for your assistance in ensuring the award progresses and an action plan is put into place to speed the opening of this new health care space. The size of the existing clinic is not keeping up with the growing local veteran population and its expansion is long overdue.

Kalispell CBOC – Minor Lease

For several years I have worked to improve the infrastructure at the existing Kalispell CBOC and it has been clear for some time that due to increased demand for care there, a new facility is needed for VA medical professionals to deliver services for veterans. The project's procurement timeline has slipped several times and needs continued attention to ensure no further delays occur, an award is made on time and any needed construction work is accomplished rapidly.

Butte and Great Falls CBOCs – Additional Space

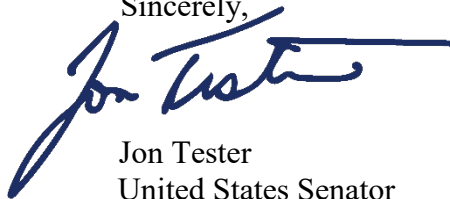
You may recall our recent work together to add additional space to the new Bozeman CBOC to accommodate physical therapy and audiology services. Because of similar high demand for those services from veterans in the Butte and Great Falls regions, additional space for these services is needed at these two CBOCs. Providing these vital services in the same locations as existing services will further facilitate convenient, one-stop and patient-centered care delivery for veterans. I ask for your assistance in moving the process forward to add this additional space through relevant contracting actions.

Browning Telehealth Clinic – Renewed Partnership

Based on information provided to my office by VA, I understand the Browning telehealth facility was temporarily closed in 2020 due to local COVID-19 precautions. As we have previously discussed, this facility has experienced challenges with consistent operations for a variety of reasons. My office has been in regular contact with VA Montana, the local community, the tribe and veteran stakeholders on a path forward for VA services in this area. I urge VA to continue to work with my office and local leaders to determine the best way to serve the veterans in this region and decrease barriers for access to VA health care and then to put this strategy into action without delay.

Each of the above projects will make a real difference to veterans in Montana and the dedicated VA employees that serve them. I appreciate your continued partnership and efforts to bring them across the finish line.

Sincerely,

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

Jon Tester
United States Senator