

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

August 21, 2015

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

Dear Secretary McDonald,

I write to you today regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) State Construction Home Grant Program, which Nevada is currently pursuing to construct a much-needed State Veterans Home in the northern part of the state. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I appreciate your attention to this critical issue that impacts the veterans in my home state.

As you know, Nevada currently has a State Veterans Home in Boulder City, which is located 30 miles outside of the greater Las Vegas valley and is a 180-bed facility that is at capacity with many more veterans on a waitlist. Not only is there a need for another State Veterans Home in Nevada to meet the growing demand, but it is critical that veterans in northern Nevada also have access to a home near them given that the only existing Nevada facility is almost 500 miles away.

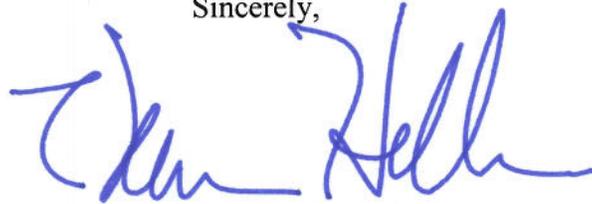
Recognizing the great need for a new State Veterans Home in the north, I have been supportive of the Nevada Department of Veterans Services' efforts to bring this project to fruition and have been closely tracking its progress. That is why my staff has repeatedly engaged with the VA regarding its process for determining how funds are allocated using the priority list. Now that the Nevada Legislature has approved its required portion of the grant funding, I respectfully request answers to the following questions regarding the VA's approval process to ensure this project can begin construction.

1. Please explain in detail how VA determines the rankings for Priority List Group 1, including rankings within the sub-groups.
2. Does the VA have plans to revise any of the criteria used to determine rankings? If so, what will those changes be?
3. Will VA grants for this program be awarded strictly in order of how they are ranked on the Priority List Group 1? If not, how does VA award grants for Priority List Group 1?
4. What specific requirements does a project need to meet to be considered "shovel ready?"
5. If a state approves its matching funds in the midst of a fiscal year, is the project moved to Priority List Group 1 for consideration during that fiscal year?
6. What remains of fiscal year 2015 funds for this program?

As the Senator representing Nevada's veteran and military community on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I want to ensure these heroes are cared for and that Nevada leads the nation in being

a veteran-friendly state. As the VA works to finalize the Priority List for the next fiscal year, I ask that the VA keep me informed of when this updated list will be released and provide a copy to my staff so I can continue closely monitoring the progress on Nevada's project. As always, thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to continuing our work together to assist our nation's veterans, and I respectfully request a reply to this letter by September 4, 2015.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Heller". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dean" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Heller".

DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator