

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:

FINANCE

BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

February 28, 2017

Director Shella Stovall  
Department of Veterans Affairs Salt Lake City Health Care System  
George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center  
500 Foothill Drive  
Salt Lake City, UT 84148

Dear Director Stovall,

As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and a Senator representing Nevada's veterans, I write to you regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Salt Lake City Health Care System considering a change to the health care services provided to veterans in Ely, Nevada, and its surrounding communities. As always, I appreciate the open communication with the Salt Lake City VA and value our shared commitment to ensuring every decision is made in the best interests of veterans.

As you know, rural health care for our nation's heroes is one of my top priorities in the Senate, which is why I raised the importance of this issue with Secretary Shulkin during his confirmation hearing and called on the VA to improve its rural health care delivery. It has come to my attention that the contract for the Ely VA Clinic, serving hundreds of veterans, will expire within a few days. Currently, the Ely VA Clinic resides in the William Bee Ririe Hospital, where the doctors within the hospital see veteran patients once the VA sets up an appointment. It is my understanding that instead of renewing the contract, the VA has proposed allowing veterans to see the same doctors at the William Bee Ririe Hospital, but that appointments would be scheduled through the VA's Choice Program.

Given this change in the delivery of health care, I want to ensure that veterans in Ely receive the same high-quality care in a timely manner and without difficulty. That is why I am respectfully requesting a detailed explanation of the following:

- How will this change in health care delivery benefit Ely's veterans?
- How will the VA ensure that Ely veterans receive the same high-quality care under this new proposal?
- How will the VA guarantee that veterans do not experience any disruptions in their critical health care, including timely appointment scheduling?
- Has the Salt Lake City VA coordinated with the third party provider under the Choice Program to ensure appointment scheduling and authorizations are timely and easy to navigate for veterans?

- Will the Salt Lake City VA commit to hosting a community meeting to inform veterans of how changes to the current VA clinic will impact them, as well as how to navigate the new system, including accessing the Choice Program?

Above all, I believe it is important to keep veterans informed, guarantee that their service will not be negatively impacted, and offer a meeting that will allow them to voice their concerns and questions prior to any proposed changes to the VA Ely Clinic.

Again, I appreciate your attention to this issue of accountability for Nevada's heroes and request an immediate response. It has been a privilege to work in collaboration with you to serve veterans, and I look forward to continuing our partnership together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Heller", with a stylized flourish at the end.

DEAN HELLER  
U.S. Senator