

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2015

COMMITTEES:

FINANCE

BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

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 to express my concerns with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget shortfall due to the VA's mismanagement. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to contact you on this concerning issue that could impact veterans in my home state of Nevada.

In a recent hearing held by the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, VA Under Secretary Gibson testified that the VA was experiencing a budget shortfall of \$2.5 billion, and without Congressional action, this shortfall will impact the operation of VA medical facilities, cause lapses in health care programs, and result in potential furloughs and hiring freezes for VA employees. First and foremost, the lack of proper budgeting and accounting by the VA is unacceptable. Following the VA health care scandal in 2014 and your confirmation as the VA Secretary, I was optimistic about having new leadership at the VA, but made clear that I expected improvement, results, and increased accountability.

Since it came to light that VA mismanaged its budget that has led to this shortfall, I have heard from veterans in Nevada who are uncertain that they will be able to receive the VA care they need, including veterans across Nevada who have been utilizing fee-basis care. The VA has the largest health care system in the nation, serving an important population, and poor management of the VA budget should never get in the way of Nevada's veterans receiving the care they have earned and deserve.

That is why I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

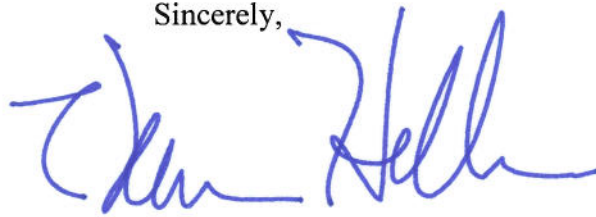
1. Given the steady increase in veterans seeking care from the VA over the past year, why was the VA not prepared to sooner address a possible budget shortfall?
2. When was VA management, including you and Under Secretary Gibson, made aware that the shortfall might occur?
3. How will the VA improve its management of the budget to ensure this type of shortfall does not occur again?

Once again, I believe this is just another example of a lack of accountability and believe that the VA has avoided its responsibility to efficiently care for our veterans by mismanaging its priorities and waiting until the last minute to inform Congress, creating uncertainty among our nation's veterans about the future of their health care.

As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am committed to working with my colleagues on the Committee to address this issue and find a path forward that will ensure there are no lapses in care for our nation's veterans. However, moving forward, additional Congressional oversight needs to be conducted to examine how VA management allowed this budget shortfall to happen. I also expect the VA to develop a solution for better managing the funds it has been appropriated to care for our veterans, as well as offer solutions for streamlining and improving the delivery of non-VA care.

As always, thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to continuing our work together to improve the VA, and I respectfully request your reply by July 30, 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