

## REPUBLICANS

JEFF MILLER, FLORIDA, CHAIRMAN

DOUG LAMBORN, COLORADO  
 GUS M. BILIRAKIS, FLORIDA  
 DAVID P. ROE, TENNESSEE  
 DAN BENISHEK, MICHIGAN  
 TIM HUELSKAMP, KANSAS  
 MIKE COFFMAN, COLORADO  
 BRAD R. WENSTRUP, OHIO  
 JACKIE WALORSKI, INDIANA  
 RALPH ABRAHAM, LOUISIANA  
 LEE ZELDIN, NEW YORK  
 RYAN COSTELLO, PENNSYLVANIA  
 AMATA RADEWAGEN, AMERICAN SAMOA  
 MIKE BOST, ILLINOIS

JON TOWERS, STAFF DIRECTOR

## DEMOCRATS

CORRINE BROWN, FLORIDA, RANKING

MARK TAKANO, CALIFORNIA  
 JULIA BROWNLEY, CALIFORNIA  
 DINA TITUS, NEVADA  
 RAUL RUIZ, CALIFORNIA  
 ANN M. KUSTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
 BETO O'ROURKE, TEXAS  
 KATHLEEN RICE, NEW YORK  
 TIMOTHY J. WALZ, MINNESOTA  
 JERRY MCNERNEY, CALIFORNIA

DON PHILLIPS  
 DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

# U.S. House of Representatives

## COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

July 29, 2016

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

Dear Secretary McDonald,

Recent media reports of the deteriorating state of facilities at the Northport, New York VA Medical Center (VAMC) are alarming. While it is not unusual for older ductwork to have condensation and oxidation problems, the VAMC management's inability to solve the root cause, which is creating health and safety risks for veterans and staff, is disappointing. The media reports state that the facility has installed filters on the ducts spewing rust, fiberglass, concrete, and mold particles. That is only a temporary, partial solution. The most troubling aspect of the whole situation is that the VAMC management reportedly became aware of the problem in mid-February yet took no effort to notify the public or Congress until after the numerous media reports emerged.

The media reports quote the VAMC management as insisting that the facility is maintained properly and financial resources have been well allocated. Records available to the Committee show Northport has a multimillion dollar annual "consolidated facilities maintenance" contract in place. Also reported are flooded pedestrian tunnels, damaged roofs, entirely vacant buildings, and a ruptured cooling tower. According to the Federal Procurement Data System, since the reported failure of the cooling tower over a year ago, the VAMC management has rented chillers and other HVAC equipment at a cost of more than \$550,000. Procurement records also show a prevalence of sole source and ostensibly competitive, one-bid facilities contracts, with a substantial amount of money going out the door for maintenance, but seemingly poor results. This suggests either the VAMC facilities personnel are failing to heed the advice of the contractors, or the contractors are taking advantage of the government. Given these facts, since Northport is currently designing a new heating plant, I am concerned about a lack of technical competence as the facility embarks on such a large, expensive, and complicated project.

Unfortunately, Northport is not the first VAMC where poor facilities management has endangered veterans' and employees' health. In addition to the water treatment issues that were associated with the deaths of at least five veterans from Legionnaires disease in Pittsburgh, operating rooms have been shut down in Columbia, South Carolina; Anchorage, Alaska; and Phoenix, Arizona due to ventilation or contamination issues in the last few years. Further, those are just a few of the facilities that have been reported about in the media, which is unfortunately the first place that Congress and the public often hear of these problems, so there could be many

more facilities with similar issues. As such, please provide the following information and documentation regarding issues at the Northport VAMC:

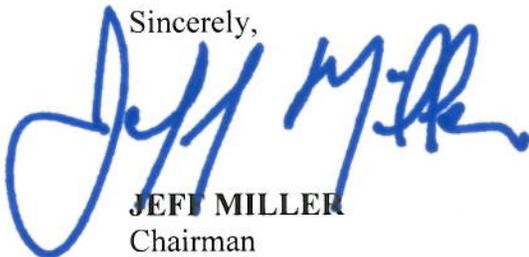
- 1) All project plans to repair or replace the HVAC systems;
- 2) All results from air quality tests performed after the high efficiency particulate air filters were installed in the operating rooms and for the two years prior to their installation;
- 3) All work orders, inspection reports, and completed checklists for HVAC and ventilation system maintenance at Northport for the last five years;
- 4) All technical or operational assessments the Office of Construction and Facilities Management has conducted of the Northport VAMC in the last five years;
- 5) The cost-benefit analysis supporting the decision to rent chillers for approximately two years before replacing the system;
- 6) Copies of the following contracts including the original awards, all modifications, selected proposals, sole source justifications, and memoranda to file/business clearances: VA243-16-F-2558, VA243-15-P-3390, VA243-15-P-4493, VA243-15-P-4401, VA243-16-C-0054, VA243-16-F-0934, VA243-15-F-4539, VA243-15-F-0993, VA243-16-F-1852, and VA243-16-C-0121; and
- 7) Any other contracts including original awards, all modifications, selected proposals, sole source justifications, memoranda to file/business clearances, and purchase card transaction documentation for HVAC repair, maintenance, replacement, or purchase.

Relatedly, given that the compromised HVAC system described in the media reports could result in elevated temperatures leading to patient and employee safety issues and mechanical failures, please explain:

- 1) Whether there have been any investigations conducted by OSHA within the last two years and the results of such investigations;
- 2) Whether, when, and in what department temperatures have reached unsafe or unusually high levels in the facility in the last two years; and
- 3) If temperatures have reached such levels, whether any adverse effects have occurred as a result, to patients, employees, or equipment.

I request this information by the close of business **Friday, August 26, 2016**. Provide the documents in electronic, soft-copy format. Do not alter the documents in any way, including but not limited to application of redactions or a water mark, or by disabling printing. The deliverables opened by this request will not be closed until the Committee is sufficiently satisfied with the responses provided. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to have your staff contact Mr. Jon Towers, Majority Staff Director, at (202) 225-3527.

Sincerely,



**JEFF MILLER**  
Chairman

JM/wm