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INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
MILITARY CONSTRUCTION,
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES

March 18, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing to raise my concerns about recent recommendations from the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission, calling for the closure of the Rural Outreach Clinic in Laughlin, Nevada. In light of such a consequential announcement for veterans in my district, I write to ensure that access to care for southern Nevada veterans comes first and foremost in any decision that is made as a result of the commission's report. As you can appreciate, as the Congresswoman representing southern Nevada, it is a top priority for me to ensure that the VA does not move forward with any closures that would jeopardize veterans' access to VA health care and services in my community.

As you know, earlier this week, Secretary Denis McDonough announced the VA's recommendations for modernizing, building, and closing facilities across the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Based on the AIR Commission's review, these recommendations include the proposed closure of the Laughlin Rural Outreach Clinic—a VA facility that has provided essential care for thousands of veterans across my district since its dedication and opening in 2015. The VA has proposed replacing the Laughlin clinic with a new site in Bullhead City, Arizona, which the AIR Commission argues will provide “primary care and outpatient mental health services in a more convenient and sustainable location for veterans.”

While I appreciate your administration's ongoing efforts to modernize and improve the VHA, I am concerned that the proposed closure of the Laughlin clinic might have the unintended effect of turning back the improvements Congress and the VA have made in recent years. With this concern weighing on many veterans in my community, I would appreciate it if your administration would answer the questions below:

- How exactly did the AIR Commission come to determine that a clinic in Bullhead City, Arizona would better serve the region's veterans than one in Laughlin, Nevada? What specific criteria make Bullhead City a preferred location to Laughlin?
- In replacing the Laughlin clinic with a new facility in Bullhead City, how would the VA ensure that the change does not meaningfully increase the distance Nevadan veterans must travel to secure the care they need?
- How would the VA ensure that this shift does not increase wait times for essential medical appointments?

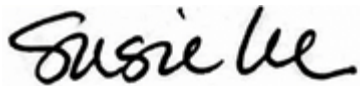
- Further, how will the new facility further our longtime efforts in southern Nevada to ensure veterans' access to the timely care they need when they need it?
- How does the VA plan to ensure that southern Nevada residents without dependable internet maintain reliable access to care if they are unable to utilize telehealth options?
- In arriving to this recommendation, how did the AIR Commission consider the implications for veterans in our most rural communities with limited access to transportation? How would the VA ensure that this proposal does not cut them off from health care access?
- As it plans this change, how will the VA ensure that care will remain available and consistent at the current Laughlin clinic until the doors of any replacement facility open?

Like you, I appreciate the immense sacrifices veterans have made for our country, and we cannot allow any reduction in access to VA care for the veterans in my community. I am glad that the VA recognizes the need to expand the care facilities available to Nevada veterans, but we must be sure that we execute this expansion and modernization with the utmost care, without disrupting care and services relied upon by our most vulnerable veterans.

As a representative for the veterans of southern Nevada, I am responsible for ensuring that our veterans maintain full access to the high-quality health care they need and deserve. I look forward to working with you and your administration to ensure that we serve those who have served our country.

Thank you for considering my questions and for ensuring the concerns of the veterans of southern Nevada are addressed in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susie Lee". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Susie" is larger and more prominent, with the last name "Lee" written in a smaller, more compact script to its right.

Susie Lee (NV-03)
Member of Congress

CC: Denis McDonough
Secretary of Veterans Affairs