

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 16, 2024

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We write to request your cooperation to advance the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) St. Louis (John J. Cochran) bed tower replacement and clinical expansion project. St. Louis-area veterans, including those in Missouri as well as Southern Illinois, have been waiting too long for modernized medical facilities and it is past time to jumpstart this project.

As you know, VA originally requested this construction project in 2010 and Congress authorized its design and planning. VA subsequently restructured the project, has acquired the necessary land and completed some site preparation. However, construction has not begun because the Department's budget request has not adequately prioritized this modernization project for two years in a row.

Specifically, the fiscal year 2024 VA budget request placed substantially all funding (\$1,388,909,000) for the St. Louis construction project in a hypothetical "mandatory – construction, major projects" account. This account never existed. Worse, after the Committee on Appropriations made clear that this proposed account was a nonstarter, VA's fiscal year 2025 budget did not request any funding for the project. VA's budgets continue to indicate that the St. Louis project ranks more highly in the Strategic Capital Investment Planning process than any other VA construction project proposed for fiscal year 2024 or 2025. Despite this, it has been left off the list for requested funding, in favor of lower ranked projects in other states. As you can imagine, this is an incredibly frustrating situation for the veterans and families we represent in the St. Louis area.

On May 1, 2024, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs took steps to secure funding by authorizing the St. Louis project. The Committee reported legislation, H.R. 6324, to divide the project into the phases identified by VA and authorize Phase 1 in an amount not to exceed \$599,840,000. However, as you know, an appropriation is necessary in addition to an authorization before a project can move forward, and it is Congress's longstanding practice to appropriate dollars only for construction projects that VA has requested. This is to ensure that investment in medical facilities is determined based on veteran need and other objective factors, not parochial interests.

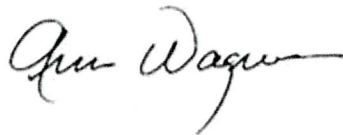
Your Strategic Capital Investment Planning process continues to rank the St. Louis (John J. Cochran Veterans Hospital) construction project as the highest priority, but the linkage to VA's budget requests has broken down. This is unfortunate and has delayed the completion of new facilities that St. Louis-area veterans deserve. We respectfully request that you work with the relevant committees to rectify this situation and pull the project over the finish line.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. Please do not hesitate to have your staff contact our offices with any questions.

Sincerely,



MIKE BOST
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs



ANN WAGNER
Member of Congress



SAM GRAVES
Member of Congress



BLAINE LUETKEMEYER
Member of Congress



JASON SMITH
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Mark Takano, Ranking Member