

BLAINE LUETKEMEYER
MEMBER OF CONGRESS
3RD DISTRICT, MISSOURI

<http://luetkemeyer.house.gov/>
www.facebook.com/BlaineLuetkemeyer
www.twitter.com/RepBlainePress

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

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COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES
HOUSING AND INSURANCE
CHAIRMAN
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
AND CONSUMER CREDIT
COMMITTEE ON
SMALL BUSINESS

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

Secretary McDonald:

On June 17, 2015, we, the undersigned Members of Congress representing the Greater St. Louis area, wrote to you regarding the protracted vacancy of the permanent director position at the St. Louis Veterans Affairs Health Care System (STLVAHCS). In your response dated June, 22, 2015, you commented that you had confidence the STLVAHCS would "have a permanent director on board very soon," but nearly eight months have passed and the position still remains vacant. In the meantime, the 8th interim director of STLVAHCS was recently appointed and the permanent director position has been vacant since March of 2013, nearly three years ago.

This vacancy is particularly troubling considering the VA Office of Inspector General's (VAOIG) recent Combined Assessment Program Follow-Up Review of the STLVAHCS which was released on January 20, 2016. This report was a follow-up to a review that the VA conducted in May of 2015. The May 2015 report concluded that the STLVAHCS did not meet multiple standards for patient care quality and environment of care. The VAOIG gave multiple recommendations to the STLVAHCS on how to improve its level of care and operational management and gave advanced notice of the date of their follow up inspection. Despite this, the follow up report released in January 2016 revealed that the STLVAHCS still did not meet the basic requirements of the VAOIG inspection in multiple areas of medical facility operations.

It is our belief that installing permanent, long-term leadership for the STLVAHCS is essential to providing the necessary structure to improve the level of care for veterans in the St. Louis area.

In your response letter of June 22, 2015, you stated the VA had identified a nominee for the permanent director position and was in the process of finalizing said candidate. To that effect, we respectfully request notification as to the status of the candidate, and assurances as to when the permanent director position will be filled. The VA should hire the best possible person for the job; however, the lack of permanent leadership over the past three years has clearly taken a toll on the STLVAHCS. We urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that the STLVAHCS is appointed a capable and qualified director as soon as possible so that veterans in the St. Louis area can receive the high quality medical care that they deserve.

Respectfully,


Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress

2440 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE: (202) 225-2956
FAX: (202) 225-5712

113 EAST PEARCE BOULEVARD
WENTZVILLE, MO 63385
PHONE: (636) 327-7055

516 JEFFERSON STREET
WASHINGTON, MO 63090
PHONE: (636) 239-2276
FAX: (636) 239-0478


Mike Bost
Member of Congress

2117 MISSOURI BOULEVARD
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65109
PHONE: (573) 635-7232
FAX: (573) 635-8347



Rodney Davis
Member of Congress



John Shimkus
Member of Congress



Ann Wagner
Member of Congress