From: Raughter, John B.
Sent: Friday, May 15, 2015 3:46:41 PM
To: All Legion Leadership
Cc:
Subject: Statement by American Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm on VA mismanagement and the Denver VA construction project

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Statement by American Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm on VA mismanagement and the Denver VA construction project:

"The utter lack of accountability that characterizes VA's management culture is staggering in its persistence. The latest accusation, that the department is illegally spending about $6 billion per year of taxpayers' money, illustrates yet again Secretary McDonald's failure to eliminate abuse among his executives.

"That being said, we cannot in good conscience link VA mismanagement to the well-being of our veterans in Colorado. The Denver hospital project may be the worst federal construction disaster in recent memory, but that fault lies with VA, not the veterans who still need care. If construction is halted by another work stoppage, the project may be irretrievably lost.

"The American Legion understands the frustration and anger generated nationwide by myriad failures of VA leadership and how it has squandered the trust of America's veterans. But we cannot hold Colorado's veterans accountable for a disaster they did not create – we need to ensure that the Denver hospital does not founder. VA and Congress must find a way to see this project through."

END

Legion to Capitol Hill: Don't penalize Colorado veterans for VA failures

While VA continues to evade accountability, the Denver hospital must not be held hostage.

American Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm has made it clear that the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital project in Denver must not be linked to VA management that continues to evade accountability for its actions.

Jan Frye, VA's deputy assistant secretary for acquisitions and logistics, told a House panel on May 14 that VA is spending more than $5 billion per year with employee credit cards – without contracts – in violation of federal procurement rules. Frye notified VA Secretary Robert McDonald repeatedly about the abuse, but he never got a reply.

“The utter lack of accountability that characterizes VA’s management culture is staggering in its persistence,” Helm said. “The latest accusation, that the department is illegally spending about $6 billion per year of taxpayers’ money, illustrates yet again Secretary McDonald’s failure to eliminate abuse among his executives.”

Despite VA’s litany of mismanagement woes, Helm said veterans in Colorado should not be penalized by the withholding of completion funds for the VA hospital project in Denver.

“We cannot in good conscience link VA mismanagement to the well-being of our veterans in Colorado,” Helm said. “The Denver hospital project may be the worst federal construction disaster in recent memory, but that fault lies with VA, not the veterans who still need care. If construction is halted by another work stoppage, the project may be irretrievably lost.”

The Denver project has been made infamous by a construction budget that exploded from $328 million to $1.73 billion. Glenn Haggstrom, the VA construction executive who oversaw the project, retired last March with full benefits after being questioned for an internal investigation.

“The American Legion understands the frustration and anger generated nationwide by myriad failures of VA leadership and how it has squandered the trust of America’s veterans,” Helm said. “But we cannot hold Colorado’s veterans accountable for a disaster they did not create – we need to ensure that the Denver hospital does not founder. VA and Congress must find a way to see this project through.”

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