

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

July 26, 2021

The Honorable Denis McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

We write to urge you to expedite the planning process for a Veterans Affairs (VA) “Major Construction Project” establishing a VA medical facility to provide inpatient services to veterans living in the Florida panhandle. Many veterans prefer to receive services at a VA medical center or in an agency inpatient setting because these facilities can provide clinical expertise for veterans’ service-connected issues.

Currently, veterans living in this area must either utilize VA Community Care authorized under the *VA Mission Act* (P.L. 115-182) or drive more than 100 miles to the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System (GCVHCS) Medical Center in Biloxi, Mississippi for inpatient services. This is troubling given that the VA forecasts the veteran population living in this area, and enrolled in VA healthcare, will increase significantly in the coming decade.

We are concerned that the Major Construction Project is still in the planning stages and as such, may be delayed or canceled by the VA’s upcoming Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission. This commission is expected to spend Calendar Year 2022 reviewing and recommending actions to modernize or realign facilities in the Veterans Health Administration and will submit recommendations to President Biden in 2023. This suggests that any major construction – including in the Florida panhandle – would not start until late 2023, at best. This is an unacceptable timeline for our nation’s heroes who answered the call to serve.

We request detailed information about the scope and size of the Major Construction Project, its timeline, whether it is separate from the AIR Commission, and when it will go forward, irrespective of the Commission’s review process.

As the veteran population increases in the Florida Panhandle, the VA needs to act decisively to provide timely access to agency-authorized inpatient care within a reasonable distance from their homes.

We look forward to working with you on behalf of Florida’s veterans.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator