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March 25, 2016

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

Dear Secretary McDonald,

I have reviewed the 31-page, unredacted memorandum summarizing the Administrative Investigation Board (AIB) findings and conclusions related to the Department's construction debacle in Aurora, Colorado. This document was provided to Chairman Jeff Miller of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

I must, once again, express my exasperation at the extensive delays in the completion and release of this report. Deputy Secretary Gibson told the Committee on June 25, 2015, nearly 10 months ago, that the AIB was "in the process of wrapping up." In September, Gibson told members of the Colorado delegation on a conference call that the AIB was complete, but was still undergoing unspecified "reviews" from the VA Office of the Inspector General and other offices.

Despite its completion, VA delayed release of the AIB even further. On October 9, 2015, Oversight and Investigations subcommittee Ranking Member Representative Ann Kuster and I sent you a letter formally requesting the AIB no later than October 23, a request you subsequently ignored. At a hearing evaluating VA's continued lack of accountability on December 9, 2015, Gibson correctly told the committee that "[w]e have waited too long for [the AIB] already," and promised to provide the report "relatively soon." Over three months later on March 23, 2016, the Department at last delivered the AIB to the Committee's Chairman, yet insisted none of it can be released publically.

As an initial matter, I insist that you make this document available to other members of Congress and the American people. I understand the Department's assertion that the Privacy Act protects certain information from public disclosure, however, American taxpayers and veterans are entitled to VA's detailed explanation as to how the costs of this project spiraled out-of-control seemingly overnight. The American people deserve to know exactly what happened to drive over \$1 billion in cost overruns. Release this unredacted document no later than April 8, 2016.

As to the document itself, I am deeply alarmed that the AIB appears to be crafted so as to focus blame on a handful of VA officials, and expediently for the Administration, officials who retired prior to facing any discipline. At a hearing held on April 15, 2015, Deputy Secretary Gibson testified that "none of the people in positions of responsibility ...are still in those positions," and that "only the former project executive is still with VA." Gibson made this claim just one month after the formal

appointment of the AIB. Conveniently, VA issued a nearly identical conclusion in a public announcement on the results of the AIB released nearly a year later. I, and certainly many members of the public, remain unconvinced that all VA officials with managerial or oversight “responsibility” over the construction in Aurora are no longer with VA. It is also intriguing to me that the AIB fails to consider potential malfeasance as a cause of the outrageous overruns on the project, recommending no further investigation into potential criminal acts of these now retired VA executives.

It goes without saying that the public and Congress’s trust in your Department has been profoundly damaged by its handling of this construction project. However, I still view the true scandal as VA’s efforts to hide the enormous problems in Aurora from Congress and the American people. As far as I can tell from the VA press release and summary, lying to Congress was not addressed in the AIB.

As the AIB points out, as early as October 2010 VA officials had been internally discussing how the “Denver project and process were already broken.” Between March 2012 and April 2014, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee held at least five separate hearings detailing evidence of VA’s construction failings. Yet during congressional hearings held as late as March 25, 2014 and April 22, 2014, VA construction executives Stella Fiotes and Glenn Haggstrom continued to insist that the Aurora hospital could be built with funds already on-hand. At any point during this time VA could have been up-front about its problems and could have asked for Congress’s help in addressing any potential funding shortfalls.

Incredibly, despite years of advanced warning driven by aggressive congressional oversight and sobering reports from the non-partisan Government Accountability Office, it wasn’t until March 17, 2015 that VA first told Congress how much additional funding the project would need. By that time, another costly shutdown in construction was expected within a matter of weeks. It is apparent that the managerial incompetence that persisted at the project as far back as 2010 continued long after the problems were identified.

At this time, I am heartened that the Aurora project appears to finally be on relatively firm footing and steadily progressing under the management of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. However, the Army Corps inherited a deeply problematic project due to VA’s lack of accountability and intentional deception concerning the scale of the construction problems in Aurora. As far as I am concerned, this AIB does not close the book on the matter of accountability in the Department of Veterans Affairs or on the Aurora project, and it fails to hold those responsible truly accountable.

Sincerely,



Mike Coffman

cc: Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson