

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 10, 2015

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

Dear Secretary McDonald:

We write to express our concern regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Draft Environmental Impact Study (EIS) for the proposed reconfiguration of the Black Hills Health Care System (BHHCS). Specifically, we write to request that the public comment period be extended to February 5, 2016, to allow for comprehensive input from all stakeholders regarding the effects and impacts identified in the document.

On October 28, 2015, the VA released its Draft EIS and National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation. The 780-page document analyzes six different proposals for the BHHCS. Each alternative plan varies in length, cost, and complexity, which will require considerable time for analysis and comment. The time constraints imposed by the current 60-day comment period may present a significant challenge for veteran stakeholders given that many may be traveling or spending time with family throughout the holiday season. The VA's public comment meetings also overlap the holiday season, which may further limit stakeholder involvement. For these reasons, we respectfully request that the VA extend the comment period to February 5, 2016.

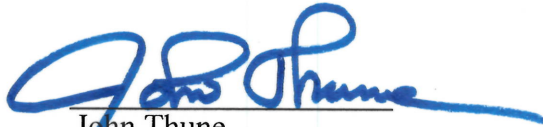
As you know, we continue to have concerns about the impact the VA's proposal to reconfigure the BHHCS will have on access to care for our region's rural veterans, veteran mental health services, the assumptions made about a future partnership with the Fall River Hospital, and data used to support this proposal. Unfortunately, there also remains an underlying distrust among veterans and Hot Springs stakeholders that the VA has proceeded with a predetermined decision to vacate the Hot Springs VA hospital and domiciliary.

We appreciate that the VA analyzed a variety of options for the Hot Springs campus, but given the wide scope of the document, we feel it is necessary to allow impacted veterans and the community of Hot Springs ample time for review and comment. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

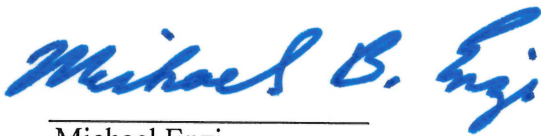
Sincerely,



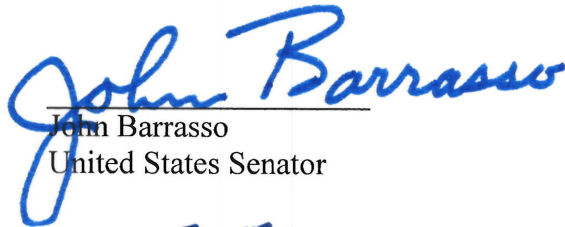
M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator



Michael Enzi
United States Senator



John Barrasso
United States Senator



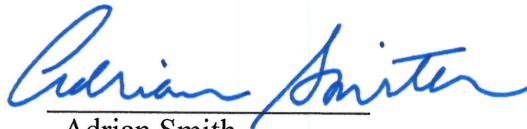
Deb Fischer
United States Senator



Kristi Noem
Member of Congress



Cynthia Lummis
Member of Congress



Adrian Smith
Member of Congress