

**PAUL A. GOSAR, D.D.S.**  
FOURTH DISTRICT, ARIZONA

504 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-2315

122 N. CORTEZ STREET, SUITE #104  
PRESCOTT, AZ 86301  
(928) 445-1683

270 E. HUNT HIGHWAY, SUITE #12  
SAN TAN VALLEY, AZ 85143  
(480) 882-2697

220 N. 4TH STREET  
KINGMAN, AZ 86401  
(928) 445-1683

WWW.GOSAR.HOUSE.GOV



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0301**

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June 6, 2014

The Honorable Sloan Gibson  
Acting Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Acting Secretary Gibson,

I want to thank you for meeting with Representatives Salmon, Sinema, and me yesterday at the Veterans Administration in Phoenix. I appreciate your time given your new role and complicated mission, and I believe we have similar philosophies for cleaning up issues at the Department. Our conversation was constructive and I am hopeful that future actions will make vast improvements to the current processes.

Congress wishes to work with the VA to assist with making those necessary changes. But the government must listen first, and then act—it must not dictate to those who have already given so much only to later suffer so much at the hands of the very government they served.

I see from your public statement you released after our meeting yesterday that you are following through on some of the items we discussed. Particularly, I am pleased to learn that the Department will be contracting with non-VA health care providers in order to get the necessary care to our veterans in Arizona. I have long advocated for such practices, especially given the numerous challenges and burdens facing the VA's current structure.

To reiterate, I will be advocating for legislation meant to enact greater reforms to the way in which the federal government administers care for our veterans. Given the sacrifices during their service, and the hardships so many veterans have endured at the hands of the federal bureaucracy, I am advocating for a type of "Veterans Health Card" which is meant to work as an insurance card does. The intent is to allow each veteran to choose any doctor of his or her own choice at any location as long as the doctor signs a requisite provider agreement with the VA. This card, similar to a voucher, puts the patient in control of their own destiny, which is how health care decisions must be made.

Expanding the federal bureaucracy is not the answer. As we have seen to the contrary, it is the problem.

I was also pleased to learn of your openness to reforming the performance pay system for VA employees. I was grateful to hear that you have decided to suspend Senior Executive Service employee performance bonuses for this fiscal year. This too is an action for which I have advocated previously as a result of the backlog and other issues within the Department. It would add insult to injury to reward these bureaucrats for failed performance.

The VA must work with Congress to foster a setting which incentivizes proper and efficient behavior. The government must not reward shoddy work. Most importantly, it must create an environment which actually instills pride and a willingness to serve the most loyal men and women in America, rather than the self-serving environment which led to these atrocities in Phoenix and elsewhere. It was refreshing to speak with you about your ideas for reforms in these areas.

It is also long past time the federal government explores cloud technologies which can share data across multiple platforms and programs. Our current information technology systems are archaic. I am confident that we can all work together to create better IT systems which produce the best results for all. It is no secret that VA and DOD alike have failed miserably in the past decade at both coordinating and speaking with one another. When tasked to find an integrated system, we have seen numerous billion-dollar failures. These outdated and inefficient systems are costing blood and treasure, and the government must explore new approaches. As you said, we must get patients off of waiting lists and into clinics for the care they need. Their lives may very well depend on it.

We must have a record system that makes sense. A servicemember's record should follow them from commission or enlistment to the grave so that the burden is not placed on veterans to retrieve minute details about their duties from DOD in order to receive the benefits they are owed. Competition breeds efficiency. As such, the federal government must also explore innovative techniques for establishing true competition. Such competition should allow public and private stakeholders to review multiple competitors' platforms, evaluate them, and ensure that the best system is integrated at both DOD and the VA so we can eliminate numerous problems in one fell swoop.

I look forward to reviewing the forthcoming Inspector General report, which you announced will be released on Monday. I expect we will be disheartened to learn more specifics of the failures currently plaguing our system.

As we discussed, it is time to start listening to veterans and health care providers instead of bureaucrats in Washington. Our numerous veteran service organizations are also ready, willing, and able to join this process, and it is time we integrate them fully so that we have all perspectives in play.

I have said before that "trust is a series of promises kept." After reading your public statement yesterday, I know that you and I agree on this fundamental foundation by which the citizenry holds faith in its government. I appreciate your service to our country, not only for your time as a member of our Armed Forces, but now as Acting Secretary facing one of the largest national challenges in recent history.

Again, thank you for meeting with my colleagues and me yesterday. It was a step in the right direction that hopefully will result in much needed reforms on behalf of millions of veterans. I stand ready to do my part in Congress to assure these reforms are explored, and I would be happy to assist you in any way I can. Please do not hesitate to call on me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul A. Gosar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" being the most prominent.

Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.  
Member of Congress  
Arizona's Fourth District

CC:

The Honorable John McCain  
U.S. Senator, Arizona

The Honorable Jeff Flake  
U.S. Senator, Arizona

The Honorable Matt Salmon  
Representative, Arizona's Fifth District

The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema  
Representative, Arizona's Ninth District