

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It has recently come to our attention that Ms. RimaAnn Nelson, current director of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Manila, Philippines, has been named as the new director of the Phoenix VA Medical Center.

This week, various media outlets reported that the Department of Veterans Affairs made the appointment, despite Ms. Nelson's questionable record. According to the VA, Ms. Nelson served as the Acting Director of the John Cochran VA Medical Center (VAMC) in St. Louis, Missouri when a whistleblower exposed the unsanitary treatment of reusable dental equipment that potentially infected over 1,800 veterans with HIV, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.

The VA Office of Inspector General Office of Healthcare Inspections conducted an investigation of the Cochran VAMC at the time, and reported that its staff had never been trained to sterilize reusable equipment. Furthermore, Cochran VAMC leadership did not "assure that corrective actions were consistently implemented in response to [Veterans Health Administration] guidance and the Infectious Disease Program Office (IDPO) report" (VAOIG-10-03346-112).

Under Ms. Nelson's tenure, the hospital closed twice for unsafe and unsanitary conditions and was ranked last in the country for patient satisfaction out of 126 VA medical centers.

A few short weeks ago, on September 1, 2016, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson met with the Arizona delegation at the Phoenix VA Medical Center. He assured us in no uncertain terms that finding the best possible candidate to replace Ms. Deborah Amdur as permanent director of the Phoenix VA was his highest priority. To think that Ms. Nelson, with her less-than-impressive past, is the best possible candidate to provide crucial leadership for the facility equated to "ground zero" of the VA scandal is unequivocally offensive to us and each of the veterans we represent. Additionally, if this is what a "high priority" looks like to the VA, there is absolutely no doubt why such problems exist in the system.

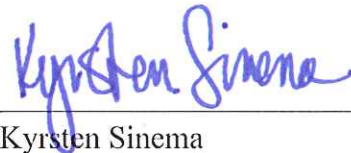
To say that the Department of Veterans Affairs has had a rough past couple of years would be an understatement. We know that you are intimately familiar with the failings of the VA healthcare system, particularly in Arizona. We therefore appeal to you with the strongest sentiment to delay this appointment until the events and Ms. Nelson's actions in St. Louis can be fully explained to and evaluated by the veterans' community in Arizona. We ask you to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to delay Ms. Nelson's appointment to ensure that the new Phoenix VA director's tenure begins on sound footing based on confidence and trust. It is imperative that the VA use the utmost scrutiny in appointing a supremely qualified director to the Phoenix VA. Our veterans have suffered enough. Correcting the substantial issues at the Phoenix VA Medical Center must be a national priority.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

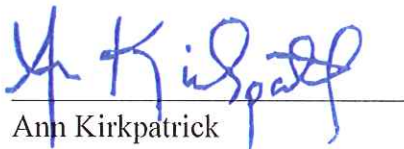
Sincerely,



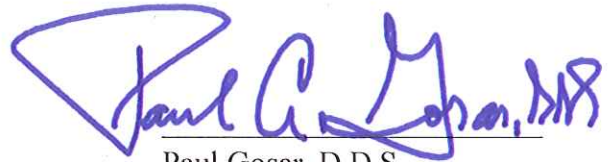
Matt Salmon
Member of Congress



Kyrsten Sinema
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Paul Gosar, D.D.S.
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