

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 2, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Collins:

I write at the request of veterans in my district who need assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to access benefits they put their lives on the line to earn. I urge the VA to take steps to improve outreach and access to services for all veterans, particularly those in rural parts of southern New Mexico who have been underserved for far too long.

For over four centuries, New Mexico has maintained a strong tradition of military service and is currently home to over 120,000 veterans. I recently met with a group of veterans in Socorro, New Mexico who explained to me how difficult it is for veterans in their community to receive assistance, ask questions, and access their benefits. Many veterans currently have to drive over an hour each way to the closest VA regional office to ask questions and speak to someone in-person about their healthcare, education, and other benefits. The veterans I met with also noted that many of the older veterans who need the most help accessing their benefits are the least well-equipped to navigate complicated online bureaucratic processes. These veterans quite simply need access to in-person support and for the VA to provide a liaison in Socorro.

Unfortunately, these concerns are not just felt in Socorro. Veterans across southern New Mexico are struggling to access the benefits they have earned and feel as if they've been left behind. Over the past two years, my office has received over 250 casework requests from veterans across southern New Mexico who are being denied services, payments, and benefits because of mistakes and red tape at the VA. I have also introduced legislation at the request of veterans in Otero and Eddy counties in southeastern New Mexico who have to drive up to five hours to Albuquerque because they are not allowed to access care at the El Paso VA Medical Center just over the state line.

The recent restructuring and massive staffing cuts has exacerbated these issues, especially for our rural veterans who cannot easily access in-person resources. Existing VA staffing shortages are already causing delays for surgeries, making it hard to access mental health care, and devastating morale for providers, employees, and veterans. This Administration cut nearly 28,000 jobs including 2,700 nurses, over 1,000 medical officers, and more than 1,000 psychologists and social workers. In New Mexico, 172 Veterans Affairs staff were cut which was 4.7% of the NM VA workforce.

Through simple changes, additional staffing, better community outreach, and in-person VA services like Vet Centers or VA clinics, VA representatives can more easily inform veterans in rural areas of their benefits, help them apply for and access benefits, and fix paperwork issues.

New Mexico veterans – especially those living in rural areas – should never feel left behind by their government. We should be making it easier for them to access the benefits they have earned by serving our country, and I urge the VA to take meaningful action to expand access to services, benefits, and assistance to all veterans, starting by placing a full time liaison in Socorro and allowing veterans in southeast New Mexico to access service in El Paso.

I stand ready to work with you to ensure the veterans in Socorro and across New Mexican have access to the benefits they have earned. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Vanger", is written over a horizontal line.