

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

April 16, 2015

The Honorable Richard J. Griffin  
Deputy Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
801 I Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Griffin:

We request that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of the Inspector General (VAOIG) investigate the situation at the Little Rock Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) that has recently come to our attention. According to recent news reports and information from the VA, in February 2012, VA received and designated an \$8 million grant to build a 1.8 megawatt solar photovoltaic (PV) system in the parking lot of the Little Rock VAMC. This construction project was completed in 2013; however, the PV system has never been activated and construction of a new parking garage has resulted in the tearing down and proposed relocation of a number of the solar panels for the PV system.

As you may be aware, reports about the PV system have highlighted the need for additional engineering changes to ensure compatibility of the PV system with the local electricity grid. Further reports have also indicated that, prior to the construction of the solar panels at the Little Rock VAMC, a construction proposal for a new parking garage had been submitted for approval and subsequently approved in August 2012. The proposed area for where the parking garage would be constructed conflicted with the area designated for the solar panels. The plans for the parking garage purportedly contained a provision for relocating the solar panels to the roof of the parking garage, but the solar panel system was still constructed even after receiving approval to build the parking garage. It is now clear that the parking garage, which is currently under construction and expected to be completed in 2016, will require the removal and relocation of some or all of the solar panels.

It has been two years since the planned activation of the PV system, and many questions remain unanswered about the project and when the VA plans to fully implement this supposed cost saving system to provide energy for the facility. We have a number of concerns and questions regarding this project, and it is essential that we ensure accountability and transparency when utilizing precious taxpayer dollars to support these extensive and costly government projects. We request that the VAOIG:

1. Evaluate the planning process for these renewable energy programs to ensure that there are safeguards in place that prevent projects from proceeding without first establishing that the project will be able to fully function for its intended purpose once constructed.
2. Determine what, if any, safeguards exist within VA construction planning to ensure that other approved and proposed construction projects at VA facilities do not conflict with ongoing projects. We are especially concerned about the Little Rock VAMC situation

because it appears that VA officials knew in advance that these two projects conflicted and decided to proceed. We cannot conceive of how such a decision was deemed acceptable and approved in light of the fact that the parking garage was approved prior to breaking ground on the solar panel construction.

3. Determine how the contractor for this PV system was selected and whether this contractor has been selected for any of the other 91 solar PV system projects listed under the VA's Green Management Program. We request that the VAOIG also investigate the performance features of the contract. We must determine any lessons to be taken from this episode that may be applicable to these other projects.
4. Determine if there are any legislative or regulatory changes that need to be made to help VA avoid similar failures in the future.
5. Provide our offices with a full briefing on the results when your investigation is complete.

We appreciate your attention to this matter, and if the VAOIG determines that legislative changes need to be made, we look forward to working together to enact the needed changes.

Sincerely,



John Boozman  
United States Senator



French Hill  
Member of Congress