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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 8, 2013

General Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
U.S. Department Of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

I am in receipt of your July 12, 2013 letter in response to my correspondence regarding bonuses awarded to senior executives at the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) within Veterans Integrated Service Network 4.

I know you must share my profound sorrow over the loss of six veterans from the deadly and preventable Legionnaires' Disease outbreak at the VAPHS. This tragedy has been a heartbreaking experience not only for the victims and their families, but for every Southwestern Pennsylvanian who expects the VA to provide the best possible care to the men and women who have served our nation.

One can only imagine the incredible pain felt by the families who sent loved ones to the VAPHS for treatment only to learn the setting in which the patient was to receive care resulted in their illness worsening, leading in some cases to their death. Nothing can be done to bring these six veterans back to their families, but I am committed to doing whatever it takes to prevent a similar tragedy from ever occurring again.

As part of that effort, I am supporting the Infectious Disease Reporting Act (H.R. 1792), recently passed by the House Veterans Affairs Committee, requiring veterans' hospitals to comply with all applicable state laws and report cases of infectious diseases like Legionnaires' to public health agencies so those with deadly conditions are treated immediately.

Legislation like H.R. 1792 can save lives, but so much more is needed.

Specifically, decisive and accountable leadership is needed. The steady stream of stories about the VAPHS tell a disturbing tale: revelations the outbreak was worse than initially reported; the lack of candor from VA officials; and an ongoing criminal investigation by the Inspector General. This has contributed to a significant erosion of trust in the VAPHS. Yet, to date, none of the actions taken by VAPHS or the Department of Veterans Affairs have been sufficient to repair the fractured relationship between VAPHS and the community, or provide solace to the families who lost loved ones.

Our veterans deserve better. The known victims of the Legionnaires' Disease outbreak deserve better. They served our country with honor and distinction, only to be let down by an institution whose mission is to fulfill President Lincoln's promise "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." It is in the memory of these veterans that I write to you today:

Frank "Sonny" Calcagno, 85
John Ciarolla, 83
Clark Compston, 74
John McChesney, 63
William E. Nicklas, 87
Lloyd "Mitch" Wanstreet, 65

Their families still grieve. They ask why no one has been held accountable for the failures that led to this tragedy. They are rightfully outraged that leadership at the VAPHS has received bonuses. I share these sentiments.

In your reply, you stated the VA "can and will do more to prevent future incidences." While preventing the spread of infectious diseases should be a top priority for VA leadership, the department must also hold responsible those in a position of authority who did not adhere to the VA's own directives and standards of care. And at the very least, the taxpayers should not be giving them bonuses.

The failure of these individuals to act decisively to prevent the outbreak has been detailed in congressional hearings, newspaper accounts, and investigative reports from the Inspector General. Please reply within ten business days whether there have been any suspensions, sanctions or firings of individuals who contributed to the failures that led to the November 2012 outbreak. The review is not over; our congressional investigations continue.

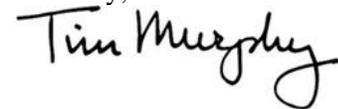
For the VAPHS to hold a standard of highest quality care, action is needed. To regain the trust of the men and women of Southwestern Pennsylvania who served our nation, candor and sincerity from VA leadership is a necessity. It is with that sentiment I present to you a simple question: If you knew then what you know now about the Legionnaires' Disease outbreak at the VAPHS, would you still have awarded bonuses to senior VA employees?

The answer, I know is a resounding, "No." Yet while I do not expect a direct answer to my question I implore you to have compassion. Think of the families, hard-working taxpayers who go to sleep each night without their loved ones, knowing that the federal government has let them down, then took their money and gave it to those who were in leadership positions when these tragedies have occurred.

With that in mind, Mr. Secretary, I call on you to rescind the bonuses that went to the leadership at Pittsburgh VA. Do what is just and right by our greater veterans' community.

On behalf of the victims' families and Southwestern Pennsylvania veterans, I thank you in advance for a timely and candid response

Sincerely,



Tim Murphy
Member of Congress