



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL  
Office of the Speaker

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## Veterans Administration recommendation could harm Veteran Services in New Mexico objected by Navajo Nation leaders

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PHOTO: Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. speaks on Veterans' issues during a 1 hour live broadcast at KGAK radio in Gallup, N.M.

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** — Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. of the 24th Navajo Nation Council shared his objection to recommendations provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission that could impact the delivery of health care services for veterans at community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) located in Gallup, Las Vegas, Española, and Raton, NM.

According to the New Mexico Veterans Services Department, the state has the 9th largest percentage of veterans by population that is not concentrated in an urban area. Nearly half of New Mexico veterans are over the age of 65 and often find it difficult to travel long distances for medical care due to service-related disabilities or illness.

“The VA has failed to fully consider the ramification of this decision to close our community-based outpatient clinics in New Mexico. Many of our Navajo veterans depend on this critical service and travel many miles, especially during this pandemic. The demand for quality care and access to telehealth service is unavailable for many of our returning veterans on the Navajo Nation. This is unacceptable and the Veterans Administration must consult with our tribal communities before any closures,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

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Last August, Delegate Begay sponsored Resolution No. NABIAU-25-21 passed by the Naabik'iyáti' Committee reaffirming previous requests to Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration to establish direct services for veterans on the Navajo Nation.

“The Navajo Nation Council expresses its disappointment with the VA recommendation and opposes the closure of our community-based outpatient clinics. Especially when there are no adequate care services to meet the growing demand of our Navajo veterans in the region. Access to quality health care services for our warriors should be a top priority because of their sacrifice to our country,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

Last week, Senators Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and Ben Ray Luján (D-N.M.) shared with Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough that the VA recommendations ‘failed to fully account for the projected veteran demand, community care network inadequacy, and lack of access to telehealth services.’

In a letter, the Senators added, “We believe that the proposed closures would hurt the service veterans receive and place a strain upon the other VA clinics and local providers in rural New Mexico. The VA must consult with Veterans Service Organizations, medical providers, and communities in northern New Mexico to fully understand the impact of these recommended changes. The country owes veterans a tremendous debt of gratitude and we are committed to ensuring our veterans receive the health care services they have earned.”

The AIR Commission recommendations are the first step in a multi-year process where they suggest the remodeling or building of new facilities, moving or closing facilities, and changing services offered. Under federal law, all VA proposals are required to be reviewed by the commission, Congress, and President Joe Biden.

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