

United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400
(202) 224-5364

February 4, 2016

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As you are aware, I have been reviewing efforts by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to compensate veterans who were exposed to mustard gas as part of experiments conducted by the U.S. military during World War II.

I sent letters to you on June 25, 2015, October 23, 2015, and December 16, 2015, requesting information on what the VA has done to reach out to affected veterans and process their claims for compensation. To date, the VA has failed to respond to the majority of my requests.

Most recently, the VA informed my office that it would be providing answers to our outstanding requests by January 31, 2016.¹ As of today, the VA has failed to provide its response. The VA did not provide any acknowledgement of the missed deadline or any communication about when I should expect to receive the response.

Of the estimated 4,000 soldiers who were forcibly exposed to mustard gas, sworn to secrecy, and largely denied any acknowledgement or compensation from our government, it is unlikely that many of them are still alive. And all of those still alive are elderly, many of them in poor health. As you are aware, the VA has failed to compensate the majority of these veterans. I am trying to help the remaining veterans before time runs out. This makes the VA's refusal to provide answers in a timely fashion all the more unacceptable.

My outstanding requests are attached to this letter. Due to the already significant delay by the VA in providing information, I expect to receive the VA's complete response to these requests no later than Wednesday, February 10, 2016.

The jurisdiction of the Special Committee on Aging is set forth in Section 104 of S. Res. 4, agreed to February 4, 1977.

¹ Email from VA to Committee Staff dated January 20, 2016.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please contact Cathy Yu on the Aging Committee staff at (202) 224-7752 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Claire McCaskill". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Claire" being particularly prominent.

Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member

cc: Susan Collins
Chairman