

**Michelle Lujan Grisham** *Governor*

**Sonya L. Smith** *Cabinet Secretary*

**DVS Secretary Smith, on VA Recommendation to Close Four CBOCs in New Mexico: “This is Not Acceptable”**

 New Mexico Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Cabinet Secretary Sonya Smith is “angry…and disappointed” over a plan by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that recommends closing four VA-managed community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) in northern New Mexico.

According to the VA’s just-released Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission Report, the four CBOCs are: Gallup, Las Vegas, Raton, and Española. The recommendations also include moving PTSD services to the Phoenix, Arizona, area.

The recommendations to the AIR Commission ~~report~~ mentions closing 174 VA or VA-contracted facilities across the nation in areas with declining populations or usage, and that VA Secretary Denis McDonough believes this will allow VA to consolidate and strengthen veteran health care nationwide.

Secretary Smith finds this hard to believe.

“Strengthen VA health care? How? How can it strengthen care by taking away facilities that serve veterans in rural states like New Mexico?” said an incredulous Secretary Smith. “This is unacceptable. There are no nearby alternative VA clinics in these areas, so the closures would only strain each community’s already-stressed non-veteran facilities. ”

Nationwide, the report recommends closing 174 of its outpatient health care facilities, and three medical centers (Brooklyn, NY; Northampton, MA; and Chllicothe, OH). It does recommend upgrading several divisions at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque—the only VA hospital in the state.

“VA came to these recommendations by asking ourselves one question above all else: ‘What’s best for the veterans we serve?’” said VA Secretary McDonough in a statement posted on VA’s website. “Because that is our number one goal, today and every day. That’s what our Asset and Infrastructure Review recommendations are all about.”

 The approval process for the proposals includes a sign-off by the President, and approval by Congress in 2023—and any changes would be at least ten to twenty years away.” said DVS Secretary Smith. “These are just recommendations. DVS sees an opportunity to reverse this decision…and turn things around. Stay tuned.”

VA’s AIR Commission report can be found at VA Recommendations to the AIR Commission Home