

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

Robert Petzel, MD,
Network Director
VA Midwest Health Care Network
5445 Minnehaha Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55417

March 5, 2008

Dear Dr. Petzel,

Thank you for coming in to brief our staff a few weeks ago. We appreciate your commitment to operating two clinics in northwestern Wisconsin.

As you know, many of the veterans served by the Hayward clinic are very concerned that the clinic will only be open two days a week. We understand that you have hired an additional practitioner to work for both clinics, raising the number of full-time equivalent doctors working for the clinics to two. We also understand that there may be a backlog due to the unexpected closure of the clinics. However, we are concerned by reports that the clinics are already scheduling veterans for appointments in late April, despite the scheduled re-opening of the Hayward clinic, given the fact that it is VA policy to provide appointments to all service-connected veterans within 30 days. We would greatly appreciate it if you could let us know whether service-connected veterans have had to wait for more than 30 days for an appointment.

We appreciate your repeated assurances that you will provide additional resources as needed to meet patient demand at both clinics. We understand that there are roughly 800 veterans receiving care from the Hayward clinic and 1000 at the Rice Lake clinic. We are aware that the number of veterans seeking care at Hayward is stable and the number seeking care in Rice Lake is growing. Nonetheless, we question why there is such a disparity between the number of days each clinic is open given the relative number of patients at each clinic. We would appreciate it if you could explain the decision to only open the Hayward clinic two days a week. We would also like to know how many practitioners will be at the clinic on those days.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We would greatly appreciate it if you could get back to us by March 21st, 2008.

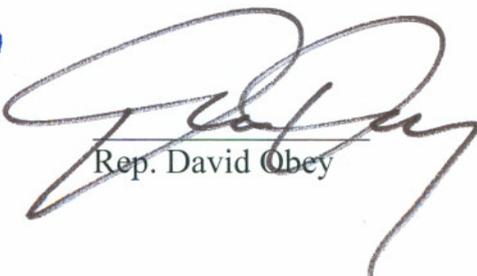
Sincerely,



Sen. Russ Feingold



Sen. Herbert Kohl



Rep. David Obey