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Congress of the United States
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January 9, 2017

The Honorable Robert A. McDonald
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary McDonald:

I write you today out of deep concern and outrage at reports that a Southwest Washington military veteran, Mr. John Weston, was forced to wait three months to receive cancer care at the VA Portland Health Care System, and died last month after a delay in treatment may have cost him his life. The cancer appeared to have been a treatable diagnosis had he received timely care. I am requesting an internal investigation into Mr. Weston's case to determine how this happened – particularly in light of a years-long effort by the U.S. Congress to force the VA to eliminate wait times, fraud, neglect and data manipulation that have resulted in poor care that has cost veterans like Mr. Weston their lives.

Mr. Weston was diagnosed with a cancerous walnut-sized tumor in his liver in July. He switched from the VA Seattle Health Care System to the VA Portland Health Care System to be near his family while undergoing treatment. When he was finally able to schedule an appointment in October, it was too late; seven days before his scheduled appointment, the tumor had grown significantly and burst, spreading cancer through his body.

Additionally, after the tumor ruptured, Mr. Weston was taken to a civilian hospital after allegedly being told the VA did not have room for him. It was not until a congressional inquiry was made that he was transferred to a VA facility. This investigation should also uncover, and address why it took congressional action for a veteran to receive care for a life-threatening issue at a VA facility.

As Mr. Weston said in an interview with The Chronicle newspaper before his passing: "It just didn't have to happen like this, and that's the worst part of it for me, that we knew about this early enough... Somebody dropped the ball somewhere, and I'm paying the price for it."

Mr. Weston served his country and battled health complications as a direct result. Like other military veterans, he had earned health care coverage through the VA. However, his care slipped through the cracks. This inexcusable delay in care and Mr. Weston's untimely passing was tragic. If only his case was an isolated one.

I request you conduct a comprehensive internal investigation as soon as possible to determine how this happened, and report the results of this investigation to Congress.

Sincerely,

Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress