

U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

B-234 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

February 17, 2021

The Honorable Denis R. McDonough
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary McDonough:

As part of President Biden's American Rescue Plan, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) submitted a \$1.7 billion supplemental funding request for the Office of Information and Technology (OIT). However, the request initially provided no explanation or justification, and an itemization of the request was not sent to the Committee until February 11, 2021, during our budget reconciliation markup.

Without any explanation or justification, it would have been irresponsible to rubber stamp any funding request, especially one as exorbitant as \$1.7 billion. However, it is an undeniable reality that the expansion of any organization drives information technology needs, and those needs carry costs. I regret that substantive conversations to discover these needs did not happen before the Committee acted and eliminated the information technology funding.

OIT seems to be one of the few elements of VA that was historically underfunded, and it does not appear to have ever undergone any zero-based budgeting exercise. Instead, each year has seen a slight adjustment up, or occasionally down, from an initial funding level that may have itself been erroneous. Simple math indicates that VA currently spends about 4.4 percent of its discretionary budget on information technology, but the \$17 billion infusion approved by the Committee, without any accompanying information technology increase, would reduce this figure to as low as 3.4 percent, which is meager even compared to most businesses.¹

Although I am disappointed by the events of the past week, I still consider this matter relevant and important. I know from your comments during your confirmation that you understand how integral information technology is to VA's ongoing organizational modernization. I intend to be a constructive partner in that effort.

¹ Information VA has provided to the Committee about OIT funding in the CARES Act (P.L. 116-136) indicates the \$2.15 billion that Congress approved was a much-needed resource infusion that has for the most part been wisely stewarded into one-time investments related to the COVID-19 response, such as telehealth network expansion and telework capacity augmentation. This is encouraging but, as one-time supplemental appropriations available in fiscal year 2021 and 2022, has little bearing on OIT's proper permanent funding levels.

To that end, I ask that all available explanatory and supporting information accompanying OIT's itemized \$1.7 billion request be provided and that OIT brief Committee staff as soon as possible to explain the request. I hope to use this information to shape future budgeting decisions so that taxpayer dollars are allocated wisely and VA maintains a healthy balance of veteran-facing programs and the support infrastructure that enables them.

Please do not hesitate to have your staff contact William Mallison, Republican staff director of the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization, at william.mallison@mail.house.gov with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt M. Rosendale". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

MATT ROSENDALE
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Technology Modernization

Cc: Frank Mrvan, Chairman, Subcommittee on Technology Modernization