

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



(R - Kansas)

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DOLE DISAPPOINTED WITH VA RESPONSE ON TOPEKA'S COLMERY-O'NEIL
HOSPITAL STAFFING PROBLEMS --

SENATOR WANTS ANSWERS TO CONFLICTING VA REPORTS

WASHINGTON -- Kansas Senator Bob Dole today expressed disappointment with the official Veterans Administration's response to American Legion allegations of staffing inadequacies at Topeka's Colmery-O'Neil VA Medical Center.

"The VA has not answered the serious question of staffing adequacy," said Dole. "Rather, they simply reported funding figures to date. A more thorough, specific discussion of staffing inadequacies is needed. This discussion should include the development of plans to alleviate any problems."

VA LETTER AND DOLE RESPONSE

On July 29, Senator Dole wrote a letter to VA Administrator Harry Walters asking for answers to an in-depth report on the Topeka facility compiled by the American Legion. Today, Senator Dole released the text of the official response:

- American Legion Recommendation: "The American Legion recommends the approval and funding of 100 full-time employees so that this VA Medical Center can adequately meet its assigned mission."
- VA Response: "Since the beginning of the fiscal year, VA Medical Center Topeka has received approximately \$2 million in recurring funds and approximately \$775,000 above the targeted allowance in nonrecurring funds. An additional \$400,000 in recurring funds was authorized for nurse staffing in fiscal year 1984."
- DOLE RESPONSE: "I am disappointed with the VA's response to questions surrounding staffing inadequacies. Today, I have expressed this disappointment in a letter to VA Administrator Harry Walters and called for a more specific response to the question of staffing inadequacies."

The Kansas Senator said that of the eight points raised by the American Legion report, seven were answered to his satisfaction.

However, the Colmery-O'Neil story took a new twist today when Senator Dole's office learned of a recent inspection of the Topeka hospital by a VA team. The on-site tour, made as a follow-up to Senator Dole's inquiry, resulted in a report from the team's nurse consultant which concluded the hospital needed 91 additional staff members.

"In the light of this conflicting information, I believe the American Legion, the Colmery-O'Neil administration and our veterans deserve a straight, meaningful response," Dole said.

According to Dole, the Topeka hospital hired 27 new staff members with the funding mentioned in Mr. Walters' response. However, the VA nurse consultant reportedly made her recommendation for 91 additional staffers after the new employees were on board.