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HOUSE REPUBLICAN
POLICY COMMITTEE

May 12, 2004

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Secretary Principi:

I am writing today to express my concerns regarding on the final CARES Decision announced on Friday, May 07, 2004. While I am pleased the Waco, Texas Veterans Affairs Hospital will remain open during further study of its function and that consideration was given to the overcrowding at the Dallas Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), I was concerned on several other issues. I believe that simply adding one new Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) is insufficient to cover the medical needs of the veterans in North Texas.

After reviewing the initial CARES Commission report, and with an understanding of the health care needs of my own constituent veterans, I believe that placing a new outpatient clinic in Denton, Texas is not only a necessity but also a wise decision.

In 2005, the 26th Congressional District will encompass several counties and will stretch from southeast Tarrant County, through Denton County, and to the Red River on the Oklahoma border. This area is very diverse: large metropolitan areas interspersed by rural and suburban communities. As this area grows, it will be essential that the VA health system in North Texas adapts to the needs of the many veterans in the area.

As you know, under the CARES Commission, the 26th District is considered part of the VISN 17, or VA Heart of Texas Health Care Network. VISN 17 is a comprehensive health care system spanning 131,534 square miles and stretching from the Oklahoma border on the North, to the lower Rio Grande Valley in the South. Specifically, we are located in the *North Market* region which houses the Dallas and Bonham facilities.

Workload data highlights the growing need for more access to inpatient medicine services in the North Market, which is served by the Dallas VAMC. The demand for inpatient medicine in the North Market is projected to increase by 39 percent over the FY 2001 baseline by FY 2012. Likewise, demand for inpatient psychiatry in this market is also projected to increase: to 30 percent over baseline in FY 2012 and to 24 over baseline in FY 2022. The CARES Commission

has stated that the remedy for inpatient care access at the Dallas VAMC is in-house expansion of existing space and space that will be vacated once some of Dallas' outpatient services are relocated to an outpatient setting.

The Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) leadership outlined at the October 3, 2003 hearing several alternative measures to address outpatient demand. These included establishing satellite clinics near parent facilities and population centers such as in Dallas. Additionally, VISN leadership noted that in the North Market, increased demand for outpatient services is coupled with the problem of the Dallas Medical Center operating at near capacity. There is a need to move some outpatient services into clinic settings to improve the Dallas VAMC inpatient area. As such, establishing additional satellite clinics and CBOCs in this market would serve an additional purpose of managing other workload at the parent facility.

There was a proposal at the hearing for a "DoD-North Market" sharing opportunity with Joint Reserve Base in North Fort Worth for possible CBOC. I believe that this is an excellent idea, however, more can be done.

It was also indicated that the current VA clinic located on Rosedale Drive in Fort Worth is overwhelmed. They are seeing twice as many patients as the facility was designed to assist. I understand there are suggestions for either expanding, building a new facility or relocating the clinic to solve the problem. I submit that the overcrowding is proof that expanding the clinic at its current location is the best solution.

Although the CARES Commission report conducted strong research, many of our veterans, especially those in more rural areas, were concerned that they would not have the same access to health care needs as their urban counterparts. I was pleased to see a Veterans Rural Access Hospital Policy was established in several areas around the country, I still believe that Denton, Texas, located in the heart of Denton County, would be ideal. Roughly a 45 minute drive from either downtown Dallas or Fort Worth, this location not only provides essential access to medical emergency centers of the highest caliber but also is far enough away from the metro centers to provide rural veterans an easier journey thus easing their access to health care facilities.

Today, May 11, 2004, I dropped a free-standing bill to authorize the construction of a veterans' clinic in Denton, Texas. As a practicing physician for over 25 years in North Texas, I am well acquainted with the medical infrastructure and needs of the area. Additionally, for two months in 1978, I conducted my residency at the Dallas VAMC. For the reasons stated above, I believe Denton, Texas is an ideal selection for a new VA clinic.

I strongly encourage you to reconsider the benefits of placing a CBOC in the heart of North Texas. Should you have any questions or more information about Denton, Denton County or the 26th District, please contact me at any time.

Sincerely,


Congressman Michael C. Burgess, M.D.