

Questions for the Record
The Honorable Ed Whitfield
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
House Committee on Energy and Commerce

March 13, 2007

Post Katrina Health Care: Continuing Concerns and Immediate Needs in the New Orleans Region

Question 1: Does the Veterans Administration continue to view the construction of a single campus with shared support services with LSU as the preferred option for a new VA hospital in New Orleans?

Response: Yes, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to view the construction of a single campus with shared support services with Louisiana State University (LSU) as its preferred option.

Question 2: In your testimony, you state that health care redesign seems to face some obstacles and delays in Louisiana. What, specifically, are those obstacles and delays? Are these obstacles and delays what prompted the VA to begin exploring other options and searching to identify alternative locations or sites for the VA hospital?

Response: The principal delay has been with the State obtaining funds in order to acquire land for the campus. Although \$300 million in Community Development Block Grant Funds (CDBG) had been set aside for partial funding of Charity Hospital, the State has still yet to send and receive approval from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the use of those funds. Part of these funds is to be used to acquire land for the joint campus. This delay has prompted VA to begin concurrently exploring alternative land options.

Question 3: What does this exploration of new options indicate about your stated goal of restoring and supporting continuing medical education in New Orleans with both Tulane and LSU?

Response: VA remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting continued medical education in New Orleans with both Tulane and LSU and looks forward to perpetuating its long and successful history with its academic affiliates. As demonstrated at other VA campuses, this can be accomplished whether on the same or separate campuses.

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The Honorable Charlie Melancon

Question 1: Mr. Lynch, did any member of the Louisiana delegation or their staff contact you or your department in regards to changing your testimony about your future relationship with LSU in the context of healthcare redesign in Louisiana?

Response: Yes, VA was contacted by a member of Congress.

Question 2: If so, who was this member and what correspondence between the

relevant parties took place, as far as you know?

Response: Senator Vitter (via staff) asked the Department to consider different language for one paragraph of my statement. Since it did not fundamentally change the meaning of the paragraph, the proposed revision was adopted. Communication was by e-mail. Copies of the original and revised text are provided below.

Original Testimony

VA's Future Relationship With LSU

VA greatly values its affiliations with medical universities, medical schools, and public and private health care facilities and views this initiative with LSU as a unique opportunity to re-establish high quality health care for the veterans in southeast Louisiana, redefine VA's relationship with important affiliates, and assist in reinvigorating the health care environment in New Orleans. At the same time, VA recognizes that LSU is bound by the timelines of a complex process and directly impacted by the outcome of ongoing discussions at both the State and Federal level. Because of this, we are committed to exercising due diligence to our veteran beneficiaries and to the tax payers, and are concurrently exploring other options for initiating reconstruction of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System's medical center. In furtherance of this, we plan to begin a site search to identify alternative locations in the near future while we continue to work with LSU on our collaborative plans.

Amended Statement

The VA remains excited about its MOU with LSU in the context of health care redesign in Louisiana. We support all of the principles behind it. At the same time, health care redesign seems to face some obstacles and delays in Louisiana. Because of this, we are committed to exercising due diligence to our veteran beneficiaries and to the tax payers, and are concurrently exploring other options for initiating reconstruction of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System's medical center within Southeast Louisiana. In furtherance of this, we plan to begin a site search to identify alternative locations in the near future while we continue to work with LSU on our collaborative plans.

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Question 3: We would like to formally request any and all correspondence between the aforementioned parties in regards to this subject.

Response: All correspondence regarding this matter took place in an exchange of email between VA and the office of Senator Vitter.

The Senators office was provided with the draft provision regarding VA's future relationship with LSU. VA was asked to consider making minor modifications to that provision language. Because the requested text was merely one of emphasis and did not change the meaning of the original VA proposed text, the Secretary approved the modification.

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