

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 6, 2008

Dr. James Peake, MD  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Peake,

We write to express our collective view with respect to the ongoing effort to construct a veterans' hospital on the Fitzsimons campus in Aurora, Colorado, as well as our firm hope that the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), veterans' groups, and the Colorado Congressional Delegation can work together to find a path forward that most appropriately fulfills the needs of all our veterans.

As you know, the proposal for a state-of-the-art veterans' facility at Fitzsimons was a centerpiece of the VA's capital construction plan under the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) process. The initial CARES process, which began in 1999, was the most comprehensive assessment of VA capital infrastructure and demands for VA health care in the Department's history.

In 2004, after having received the recommendations of the CARES commission, then-Secretary Principi submitted a plan to Congress detailing the capital construction priorities for which the VA intended to seek congressional authorization. The Secretary's plan identified the VA hospital at Fitzsimons as one of its top medical "major construction" priorities.

Since that time, Congress has worked diligently to authorize and appropriate the funding necessary to get the project underway and on the path to completion. In April 2008, the VA proposed a new plan that would considerably alter the original project objective. Since that time, we have had productive consultations with VA leadership, veterans' groups, and other stakeholders to discuss the differences between the CARES-authorized design and the new proposal. We have concluded that the best way forward is to continue with a modified version of the original, comprehensive, stand-alone hospital concept as outlined by the VA through the CARES process. We believe that the CARES-recommended plan is the only fully vetted proposal that fulfills both the needs of veterans throughout the Rocky Mountain West as well as the guidelines outlined by the VA's own comprehensive review and design process. It is also the most developed and therefore represents the most expeditious route to a new VA facility.

The CARES plan explicitly envisioned a veterans-focused, stand-alone facility that would provide comprehensive in-patient and outpatient care for veterans. We recognize

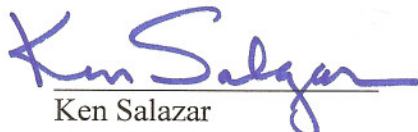
and understand that the overall cost estimates for this project continue to rise in excess of initial projections, and we are eager to work with the VA and other stakeholders to find ways to reduce costs.


In the VA's own internal planning documents, several cost-saving measures are proposed for the CARES-recommended stand-alone hospital concept. We recognize that the \$1.06 billion estimate is high, especially when compared with other hospitals under construction across the state; that is why we look forward to working with the VA and with veterans' groups to explore alternative design concepts and other ways in which cost-savings can be achieved. In addition, there are cost-saving aspects of the new plan released in April of this year that do warrant serious attention as we move forward.

We view the Fitzsimons VA hospital project not only as a VA project, but as a collaborative effort between the Department, the Colorado Congressional delegation, and the veterans whom it is our shared duty to serve. We all bear responsibility, and so we must all work together to ensure veterans throughout the Rocky Mountain West can benefit from the most comprehensive health service-delivery plan that our government can provide.

Your recent efforts to cooperate and work collaboratively with the Colorado delegation and veterans' groups are much appreciated. We thank you for your commitment to veterans, and look forward to continuing to work together to complete this project.


Sincerely,


  
Ken Salazar  
United States Senator

  
Wayne Allard  
United States Senator

  
Ed Perlmutter  
Member of Congress

  
Diana DeGette  
Member of Congress

  
Mark Udall  
Member of Congress

  
John Salazar  
Member of Congress