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**Rep. Bilirakis wants VA to approve Haley polytrauma project**

By William R. Levesque, Times Staff Writer

Published Thursday, April 26, 2012

<http://bit.ly/I9Zd3W>

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Haley had been appropriated \$231.5 million in 2009 for a number of construction projects at its Tampa campus, including a new parking garage and a renovation of four floors of bed space.

But Haley has since proposed building a new "bed tower" rather than renovating the old space. Other Haley projects have come in under budget, the cost analysis shows. And the agency had allocated about \$85 million to renovate existing bed space.

So if the VA builds a new \$119 million bed tower, rather than renovating bed space, the project would be "budget neutral," Haley officials have told lawmakers.

The budget analysis shows cost savings if a new bed tower is built would total \$500 million over 30 years. The hospital says it could use old bed space for other departments that now lease expensive office space outside the hospital.

"This forward-thinking proposal truly makes sense, and we would like to work with you to move it ahead," the letter said. "Given the reality of our nation's financial situation, and our obligations to be wise stewards of the taxpayer dollar, we are deeply concerned that the (VA) has slated to move forward with the project as is, knowing that it is ultimately a more costly alternative."

The letter asked Shinseki to reveal what needs to be done to complete the revised project.

It is unclear why the project was not included in the president's budget proposal. VA officials in Tampa did not return a call for comment on Thursday.

Haley has the busiest polytrauma unit in the nation. The unit treats the most-severely wounded troops from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[Click here to read the letter to Secretary Shinseki](#) .