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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0900

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WASHINGTON OFFICE
1124 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0909
(202) 225-5755

DISTRICT OFFICE
35111 U.S. HIGHWAY 19 NORTH
PALM HARBOR PROFESSIONAL CENTER
SUITE 301
PALM HARBOR, FL 34684
(877) 773-2871

110 WEST REYNOLDS STREET
SUITE 101
PLANT CITY, FL 33563
(813) 752-1842

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20420-0001

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

We write to you today about a matter of great importance. Currently, James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital (JAHVH) serves more than 116,000 veterans in the Tampa Bay area and is the busiest of four polytrauma facilities in the nation. Unfortunately, the facility's infrastructure is also the second worst in the nation, with its inpatient wards non-compliant with either HIPAA or CARES standards.

As you know, \$231.5 million in funding has already been approved for a three-phase project to construct a polytrauma health care center, renovate the main hospital building, and construct a parking garage on site at JAHVH. Bids for the polytrauma center and the parking garage came in markedly lower than estimates indicated. After a thorough cost analysis, it has been determined that, at no additional cost from the original appropriation, the scope of the main building renovation can be expanded to encompass a new facility that is conservatively estimated to save the Department of Veterans Affairs more than \$500 million over 30 years.

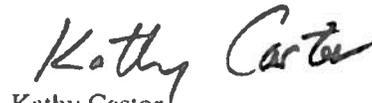
We applaud the efforts of the individuals at JAHVH to work within the confines of appropriated money while looking forward to develop solutions that will maximize federal funding and improve conditions and accessibility for veterans utilizing the facility. Maintaining the original scope of the project is only a temporary fix to a long-term problem; the facility will still be in continuous need of further future renovations, costing an estimated \$156 million.

Such modifications to the existing hospital will also impede veterans' access by necessitating entire sections of the facility to close, reducing the number of beds available to sick veterans. In addition to the short-term space reductions, because the renovation converts all double, triple and quadruple rooms to single-patient rooms, the overall number of beds at JAHVH will decrease. Constructing a separate facility on the property, however, will allow the current hospital to function without disruption and actually increase the number of beds to meet the projected FY 2018 needs.

The prospect of a new bed tower is both in accordance with the May 2004 CARES decision and JAHVH's Master Plan. The cost analysis provided by JAHVH is comprehensive and demonstrates the financial benefits of enhancing the scope of this project. We believe that the timing is optimal and encourage you to consider allowing James A. Halcy Veterans Hospital to utilize the cost savings they have realized to better benefit veterans in the region for years to come.

Sincerely yours,


Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress


Kathy Castor
Member of Congress