

Mr. Chairman:

My name is Ron Reynolds. I represent the National Veterans Affairs Council – District 1, of the American Federation of Government Employees. Which in VISN 1 encompasses well over 3000 Bargaining Unit employees Professional and non-Professional, as well as being a veteran myself.

My concern as well as AFGE concern is that these recommendations fail to take into account the fact that the population of the elderly veterans will grow by 500,000 over the next 7 years, and the numbers of the very elderly veterans (ages 85+) will triple to over 1.3 million for at least the next 20 years.

The implementation of the CARES plan is that none of these veterans will receive long term care at V.A. facilities. Rather their care will be privatized and will not have the benefit of the specialized care only Veteran facilities can provide. Providing Veterans with care at Veterans facilities was a solemn promise made to the veterans of this great country that CARES is trying to break.

I personally have had 3 extended stays in the V.A. facilities and I tell you there is something special about the fact the person next to you is a ‘conrad in arms’ and to strike up a conversation all that is needed is to ask what branch of the service were you in? ... You can’t do that when long

term care is privatized.

The privatization of veteran's long term care either for those with 'psychiatric problems or dementia' is neither cost effective nor consistent with the promise made to our veterans, 'lifetime care' -- or is this just another promise to be broken.

Closing VA facilities that can be refurbished to meet the long term care needs of our large and growing population of the elderly veterans wastes precious dollars that should be used for our veterans.

The CARES plan says that it includes both closures and expansions. Nothing should be closed or mission changes set in motion until all the mission changes and all the expansions are funded, built and operational. I have personally witnessed the hardship unfunded mandates creates, 1st in the integration of VA-CT and then in the integration of the Boston Health Care System. There should be no facilities closed or mission changed until all are fully funded, built and operational: otherwise we risk the depletion of the veteran's system capacity, when capacity is lost, the VA will be able to privatize and say one will lose his or her job.

The implementation of the CARES plan means the destruction of jobs—good jobs held overwhelmingly by veterans - Veterans taking care of Veterans.

This will increase the number of indigent veterans needing care and housing; jobs at Veterans facilities are some of the best jobs in any community, they have pensions, health insurance, regular salary adjustments, training and potential career development. The work force is a diverse work force. The commitment to Veterans is a top motivation of this workforce. The same will not be true in private facilities, as evidenced by a government shut down a few short years ago. When employees worked and cared for our nations veterans without pay I ask will the private sector do that?? I think not!!

Also in private facilities our veterans will be in a minority and no one will consider their special problems and/or their needs.

The private sector nursing home industry trade association estimates that the cost per patient for long-term care will exceed \$100,000 per year in the next decade. The 'not-for-profit' veterans system can provide superior care to our veterans for a lower cost.

The VA says it wants to use enhanced 'Use Leases' when they respond to our charge that they have no plan to meet our Veterans long term care needs. There is no data that shows that the private sector will be able to cover the VA's need through the enhanced use lease. Regardless of whether they materialize, they will not be the same as veterans only facilities

-- that guarantee the veteran access.

In conclusion CARES is not about moving facilities and capacity to locations where the veterans are. It's about closing facilities & reducing capacity so that veteran care can be privatized. Privatizing VA care will cost more -- the Veteran will get less, lower quality, less specialized care, less commitment & less recognition. Thousands of Veterans will lose their jobs, taxpayers will lose and Veterans will lose. Federal employees who have devoted their lives to care for our veterans and the promotion of their 'best interest' will lose. But private nursing home care owners-operators will win and win BIG.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Commission.