

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 26, 2003

The Honorable Everett Alvarez, Jr.
Chairman
CARES Commission
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Alvarez:

The CARES Commission is enormously important for the people of Nevada. In addition to being the fastest growing state in the nation, Nevada is now the third most popular retirement state in the nation. Most notably, Nevada is home to over 240,000 veterans, and more than one-third of Nevada's residents over the age of 65 have worn the uniform of the United States. We are pleased to see the Department of Veterans' Affairs carefully reviewing the distribution of its resources so that it can better respond to the needs of our veterans. As you are well aware, Nevada has pressing needs and we encourage the Commission to take swift action to address the unique challenges facing our state.

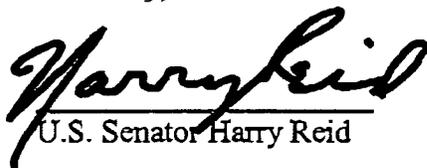
Each new facility proposed by the Draft National CARES Plan for Las Vegas, including the full-service inpatient hospital, the state-of-the-art outpatient clinic and surrounding community based outpatient clinics (CBOC), and the long term care nursing home, are critically important for improving the level of service available to Nevada's veterans and maintaining that level of service for the foreseeable future. Clark County, more than any other area in the nation, has seen skyrocketing growth over the last twenty years. What was once a quiet oasis in the desert is now an important and bustling metropolitan center of 1.5 million people. And with a population of more than 160,000 veterans living in and around Las Vegas – and tens of thousands more expected over the next decade – nothing short of these major medical facilities is acceptable in order to serve this community. We are strongly supportive of each of the medical facilities which the VA has planned for Las Vegas and we are pleased that Secretary Anthony Principi has added his endorsement to the proposal.

The other facility which we hope that the CARES Commission will place on its list of high priority initiatives is the proposed CBOC for Elko. The sizable veterans' community in northeast Nevada is one of the nation's most underserved populations when it comes to healthcare services. Currently, veterans in Elko County and surrounding areas are forced to travel a minimum of 400 miles to receive the care they need and deserve. These exceptionally long commutes, at times complicated by severe weather, mean that veterans are unfairly deprived of essential VA services. With a relatively small expenditure, however, this injustice can be corrected. The Veterans

Health Administration Rocky Mountain Network (VISN 19) estimates that the cost for the first year of the proposed Elko CBOC contract would be between \$160,000 and \$250,000. This price tag represents a minimal cost when compared to the immense benefits that such a facility would provide. Additionally, Province Healthcare, the owner of a recently remodeled and centrally located clinical facility, has offered to lease its property at a nominal rate should the Elko CBOC be approved, leaving no expected construction costs associated with this project.

As our military continues to do battle in Iraq and Afghanistan, we are reminded daily of the enormous bravery and sacrifices displayed by those who wear the uniform of the U.S. armed forces. In these difficult times, it is our obligation and our honor to serve those who have helped keep our nation free. We hope that you will work with us as we strive to bring necessary and high quality healthcare services to Nevada's veterans.

Sincerely,



U.S. Senator Harry Reid



U.S. Senator John Ensign

Testimony of Congressman Jim Gibbons
Before the CARES Commission
Las Vegas, Nevada
September 26, 2003

Good morning.

I am Congressman Jim Gibbons,
Representative for the Second Congressional
District of the Great State of Nevada.

Thank you for inviting me to testify before
the VISN 22 CARES Commission this morning.

The Veterans Administration health care
system was designed and built decades ago,

when inpatient care was its primary focus.

Since then, medicine has changed but the bureaucracy has remained largely the same.

The Veterans Administration medical system does not provide care as efficiently as possible and medical services are not always easily accessible due to the changes in geographic concentrations of veterans and new methods of medical treatment.

Additionally, veterans must now contend with long delays in admissions and long delays

in diagnosis and treatment. Recognizing this shortfall and building upon earlier transformation efforts, the Department of Veterans Affairs initiated a new planning process – CARES, Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services. Simply stated, the CARES process is a realignment study to ensure veterans receive the right care, at the right time, at the right place.

It is designed to objectively evaluate the best ways to provide quality health care and services

to more veterans, in more locations, now and into the future.

The program assesses veterans' health care needs across the country, identifies planning initiatives to meet those needs in the future, and guides the realignment and reallocations of capital assets to support the delivery of health care services.

Through CARES, the Veterans Administration will optimize care delivery in terms of both quality and access for the veterans

of Southern Nevada.

Once the CARES process is fully implemented, the Veterans Administration will be able to provide accessible care to more of Nevada's veterans in the most convenient and appropriate settings.

I have studied the Draft National CARES plan for VISN 22, and I fully support all its suggestions and recognize the need for others not listed.

Southern Nevada and Las Vegas have one of

the fastest growing veterans populations in the country, and ensuring their medical care needs are met is one of my top priorities.

The Draft National CARES Plan addresses the need for an 87-bed hospital with an expanded multi-specialty outpatient clinic and a 120-bed nursing home. These elements are vital to providing Southern Nevada's veterans with the future care they deserve.

I pledge to work closely with Secretary Principi and this commission to fully fund these

projects once responsible cost calculations are made by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I applaud your brave efforts and look forward to working with the Department of Veterans Affairs to make the CARES plan a reality.

Your diligent work is forging a path that future generations of veterans can rely upon when they need quality medical care.

Again, I appreciate your time and thank you for the opportunity to address this commission.

JON C. PORTER
3RD DISTRICT, NEVADA

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
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August 21, 2003

Mr. Richard Larson
Executive Director
CARES Commission
Department of Veterans Affairs

Dear Mr. Larson:

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft national plan created by the Department of Veterans Affairs Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission. I look forward to working closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Anthony Principi, to ensure that veterans in Southern Nevada are provided the best possible health care.

I was excited to join Secretary Principi in announcing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) proposal to build a full-service hospital in Las Vegas that will become the centerpiece of a major expansion in health services for veterans in Southern Nevada. It is time to show our appreciation to these brave men and women who have sacrificed so much for our great nation. Veterans in Southern Nevada have for many years indicated the importance of such a facility, and I have agreed with them and worked towards securing an appropriate facility. The CARES recommendation to construct a new hospital in Las Vegas is certainly a big step in the right direction. In addition, I strongly support the CARES recommendation to establish a new nursing home in Southern Nevada. These proposed facilities would help to meet the varied health care needs of our veterans.

I would also like to take this opportunity to request the establishment of a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) to be located in Laughlin, Nevada. I would appreciate your prompt consideration of this matter and your help in expediting the establishment process. I have also been made aware of a current hold on the opening of new CBOCs until the CARES process is complete; however, I urge you to make an exception to this hold for the veterans of the Laughlin area who face exceptional hardships from a lack of accessible health care.

It is my understanding that the Laughlin veteran community meets the established criteria for communities eligible for CBOC services. Existing VA facilities do not adequately meet the primary healthcare needs of veterans residing in the Laughlin area. Patients must drive approximately 200 miles round trip to receive healthcare in Las Vegas. During much of the year, high temperatures in the Mojave desert combined with congested infrastructure make travel difficult and dangerous for older veterans. Approximately 1,400 veterans from the Laughlin area visited the VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System for VA healthcare in fiscal year (FY) 2002. This number does not include veterans who forego receiving primary medical care essential for maintaining general good health because of difficulty accessing VA facilities.

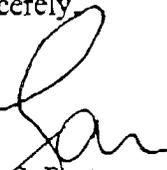
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As you know, CBOCs provide a valuable service for veterans across the nation where VA medical treatment is not readily accessible. Currently more than 17,000 veterans reside in the rapidly growing Laughlin, NV area. Authorization for a CBOC in Laughlin would reduce travel difficulties and shorten waiting times for these veterans in need of outpatient health care.

Establishing an outpatient facility for veterans in the Laughlin area is one of my highest priorities, and I strongly support the authorization of a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Laughlin.

The population of Southern Nevada is constantly changing and Nevada is one of our nation's fastest growing states. It is vital that the Department of Veterans Affairs continue to examine the growing needs of Nevada's veterans when establishing health care facilities and providing care. I am thankful that the VA is considering the needs of veterans and I look forward to working with them to ensure veterans receive the care and respect they deserve.

Sincerely,



Jon C. Porter
Member of Congress

JCP/sm



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KENNY C. GUINN
Governor

September 10, 2003

Chairman Everett Alvarez, Jr.
CARES Commission
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington DC 20420

Dear Chairman Alvarez:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information at this public hearing for this very important endeavor. The Capital Assets Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) is a strong step for the Department of Veterans Affairs to take in continuing to improve health care and services to the nation's heroes: Our Veterans. Nevada is proud of our long relationship with the Department of Veterans Services in providing this service for Veterans.

Nevada's population is one of the fastest growing in the nation and the Nevada veteran population of 240,375 continues to grow. This population growth has placed unprecedented strains on the limited veteran medical and support facilities now available. The announcement of a new 87-bed hospital with an expanded multi-specialty outpatient clinic and a 120-bed veterans nursing home will do much to increase care for the Veterans of Southern Nevada.

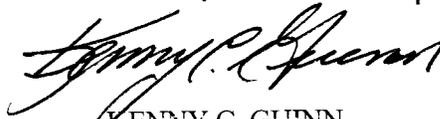
The expansion of inpatient tertiary care in the Reno medical facility and increased use of local contracts for cardiac service, cardiac surgery, and neurosurgery will greatly reduce the out of state travel now required by northern Nevada veterans to receive this specialized health care. The establishment of a Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Fallon in fiscal year 05 will further reduce travel time for veterans living in the north central rural areas of Nevada.

It is strongly requested that establishment of a CBOC in Elko be included in the highest priority level of this CARES plan. The 6,000 veterans residing in this rural area of Northeastern Nevada are isolated from adequate health care that would be provided by this CBOC in Elko. This will reduce the long out of state travel times now required by Veterans in Elko and White Pine Counties seeking health care at the Veterans Medical Facility in Salt Lake, Utah.

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Nevada looks forward to a continuing expanding partnership in providing care and services to "Those who have served", Nevada Veterans.

Sincerely,



KENNY C. GUINN
Governor

CFulkerson:jl

cc: Secretary Anthony J. Principi
Senator Harry Reid
Senator John Ensign
Congressman Jon Porter
Congresswoman Shelley Berkley
Congressman Jim Gibbons
Ron Kruse, Chairman, Nevada Veterans' Services Commission