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HEALTHCARE

**Statement of Congresswoman Shelley Berkley**  
**Las Vegas Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services Commission**  
**Hearing**  
**September 26, 2003**

Thank you for holding this hearing today on an issue that is so important to those whom I represent.

Since being elected to Congress in 1998, hardly a day goes by when I don't hear from local veterans about their health care needs and the overwhelming demand for VA services in Southern Nevada.

Unlike other regions of the nation which have seen a decline, Southern Nevada's veterans population is one of the fastest growing in the nation and it is getting larger every day. The VA now predicts that the number of annual visits by veterans to their primary health care clinic will rise from 200,000 to more than half-a-million by 2010, and we are already struggling just to address current demands. In short, Southern Nevada veterans are facing a health care crisis. We have a fragmented series of temporary clinics, limited long-term care facilities, no full-service hospital and no end in sight to our growing health care demands.

Beginning in 1997, the Addeliar D. Guy III Ambulatory Clinic served the primary health care needs of the more than 160,000 veterans living in Southern Nevada. But in June of this year, the VA abandoned the clinic due to allegations of substantial structural defects. As a result of this closure, veterans' health services are now spread across the Las Vegas Valley in 10 temporary locations. For some veterans who need more than one type of care, that can mean having to visit multiple locations on a regular basis.

A lack of treatment options also means that many Southern Nevada veterans are being forced to travel hundreds of miles to VA hospitals in California for essential services. In fiscal year 2002, the VA issued more than 1,500 referrals to Southern California facilities. This places an unacceptable burden on our veterans in need of surgical or other procedures, as well as their families.

The need for an additional long-term care facility is also well established. The

Nevada State Veterans Nursing Home in Boulder City, the only one of its kind in the state, is expected to be full by April of next year.

And while the number of beds in the unit is being expanded to 180, it is expected that the volume of demand will continue to exceed available resources well into the future. As the number of health care visits is expected to increase, the number of aging veterans needing assistance with their daily lives will only continue to increase.

As a member of the Committee on Veterans Affairs, I have been closely following the process for expanding care options in Southern Nevada. I introduced legislation in 2002 that called for the creation of a full-service patient care hospital, an outpatient clinic, and a comprehensive long-term care nursing home facility.

I have hosted VA Secretary Anthony Principi, who came to Las Vegas at my invitation for a first-hand look at our needs here, and organized a town hall meeting so he could directly hear from our local veterans about the state of their available health care services.

I am pleased the Veterans Health Administration has recognized the needs of Southern Nevada and that the CARES (Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services) plan calls for construction of a new campus for veterans' care.

Recently, I introduced legislation that would authorize funding for the construction of a new VA hospital, outpatient clinic and long-term care facility in Southern Nevada. The bill has been cosponsored by Representative Jon Porter and companion legislation has been introduced by Senator Harry Reid. It is urgent that these funding bills are passed and that we begin to move forward on the selection of a site. As it now stands, it will take several years to construct the new facilities needed to house the hospital, outpatient clinic and long-term care facility. In the meantime, veterans living in Southern Nevada will have to continue to rely on a string of temporary facilities for the health care needs or face traveling to California for essential services.

America's veterans served our nation and now we must honor our commitment to these brave men and women. Providing high-quality health care is part of keeping our promise to these heroes and sends an important message to our troops now deployed at home and abroad in the defense of our nation. These future veterans, some of whom call Nevada home, will also one day be eligible for VA care, and a new hospital, long-term care facility and outpatient clinic in Las Vegas are critical to providing health care services to our veterans today and in the future.