

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2003

Mr. Everett Alvarez
Chairman, CARES Commission
Department of Veterans' Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Chairman Alvarez:

Included in the draft National CARES plan is a proposal to construct a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) in the U.S. Territory of American Samoa. Construction for this CBOC has received a priority 3 rating and we are writing to request your support in adjusting this rating to priority 1.

For the past two years, we have worked to establish a CBOC in American Samoa. Although only 1,000 of American Samoa's veterans are duly registered with the VA, more than 5,000 veterans live in the Territory. None have on-island access to VA medical care and all in need of substantive care must fly to the nearest VA facility located at Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii.

As you know, American Samoa is 2,300 miles away from Honolulu. Flight time is about 5 hours each way and flights to and from American Samoa are only available twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays. Additionally, the only provider of medical care in American Samoa is the LBJ Tropical Medical Center. LBJ was constructed in 1967 and patient wards have not been renovated since this time. Although these wards must be upgraded to meet Life Safety Code and ADA standards, LBJ lacks the funds to make these changes. LBJ is also without vital medical equipment and its nurses and medical officers are in need of advanced training.

Given these circumstances, veterans living in American Samoa have nowhere to turn for on-island medical care and we believe action must be taken to provide this underserved population with the VA assistance and care they deserve. This is why we are urging you to include in your recommendations to the Secretary a priority 1 rating for the establishment of a new CBOC in American Samoa.

The U.S. Army Reserve has recently agreed to allow the Veterans' Administration to occupy a newly constructed butler building adjacent to its Reserve Center in American Samoa. The U.S. Army Reserve has also agreed to reconfigure the building to VA needs and transfer its operations. All that remains is for the VA to agree

to purchase equipment and assign one doctor and one nurse to staff the clinic. With your support, we are hopeful that the Secretary will agree that this is the right thing to do for veterans living in American Samoa. Like every other veteran, they too have "borne the battle" and deserve nothing less than access to quality medical care.

Please support American Samoa's veterans. Please recommend a priority 1 rating for the establishment of a CBOC in American Samoa.

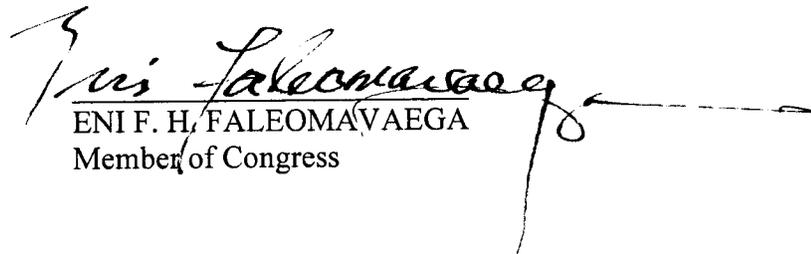
Sincerely,



DANIEL K. INOUE
U.S. Senator



DANIEL K. AKAKA
U.S. Senator



ENI F. H. FALEOMAVEGA
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

September 30, 2003

Mr. Everett Alvarez
Chairman, CARES Commission
Department of Veterans' Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Chairman Alvarez:

The draft National CARES plan your Commission is considering includes a recommendation for the establishment of a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) in the U.S. Territory of American Samoa. However, the plan concludes that this CBOC be given a low priority compared to others contemplated by the CARES process for future development. We are writing to request your support in raising the priority so that the clinic in American Samoa may be established.

Medical care for veterans living in American Samoa comes under the jurisdiction of the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21 which includes Northern California, parts of Western Nevada, Hawaii, Guam, and American Samoa. VISN 21 has established hospitals and VA community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) throughout these markets, with the exception of American Samoa. We believe the time has come to address this unmet need, and that this can be done on a highly cost effective basis.

More than 5,000 veterans live in American Samoa and over 1,000 are enrolled in VA health care. Enrolled veterans are forced to travel more than 2,300 miles from American Samoa to the nearest VA facility in Honolulu, Hawaii to receive the medical care and attention they need. Considering that the Honolulu VAMROC spends over \$1 million annually to fly American Samoa's veterans to and from Honolulu or the mainland for vital medical care, we believe the establishment of a CBOC in American Samoa would be a wiser use of federal funds. Furthermore, seriously ill patients should not be forced to travel long distances to receive VA health care.

While veterans living in American Samoa may seek local treatment at the LBJ Tropical Medical Center, it should be noted that this comes at the expense of the American Samoa Government. It should also be noted that the LBJ Tropical Medical Center was constructed in 1967 and its current standard of care is not in keeping with that required for ill and disabled veterans. LBJ's medical equipment is outdated and its clinical staff is in need of further training to be able to meet veterans' needs.

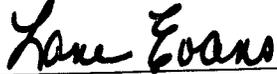
At this time, the U.S. Army Reserve has agreed to support our efforts to establish a CBOC in American Samoa and has offered a building at no cost. The Honolulu VAMROC estimates that equipment purchases for a new CBOC would be a one-time investment of about \$500,000. Recurring costs for VA staff would be approximately \$250,000 per year.

Given the distance involved and the limited commercial air service in and out of the Territory, we would appreciate your support in including a new CBOC for American Samoa in your recommendations. We also respectfully request that you change the priority for this CBOC from 3 to 1.

We thank you for your favorable consideration of this request and we continue to wish you the very best.

Sincerely,


CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs


LANE EVANS
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs


ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
Member of Congress



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS 9TH REGIONAL SUPPORT COMMAND
1557 Pass Street, Fort Shafter Flats
Honolulu, Hawaii 96819-2135**

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF:

September 29, 2003

Office of the Commander

Honorable Eni F.H. Faleomavaega
2422 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-5201

Dear Mr. Faleomavaega,

Thank you for your letter of September 26, 2003. Currently the 9th Regional Support Command (RSC) is building a new US Army Reserve Center which is scheduled for completion in October 2004. Once the center is completed and the soldiers move out of the existing center, we plan to give AAFES an out-grant to move into the old center. They will provide a military clothing sales section and a wider variety of items for our soldiers and retirees in the local community.

After AAFES remodels the old USAR Center and moves out of the existing operations, we plan on giving the Veterans Administration (VA) an out-grant for the Butler building behind the current AAFES retail store. We have discussed this with Mr. Gary Van Brocklyn and Mr. Dewey Brown from the VA Affairs office and they are very excited about the prospect. This building is 3600 square feet (800 square feet larger than what they wanted the 411th to build for them by the LBJ Hospital) and will meet all of their requirements with additional room for exam rooms and a tele-med center. The 9th RSC Family Support Group and soldiers assigned to an unaccompanied tour in American Samoa will use the AAFES retail space.

This is still in the conceptual phase and will depend on the future needs of the 9th RSC units stationed in American Samoa. By Army Regulation I cannot authorize a non-Department of Defense organization space in a US Army Reserve center if all of the space requirements of the USAR units are not met.

If you have any more questions or need any clarification please contact my Senior Plans Officer, Major Rick Rouzer at (808) 438-1600 x3255.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. H. Ma".

John Y. H. Ma
Brigadier General, U.S. Army Reserve
Commanding

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

FAXED

5/16/01

May 16, 2001

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

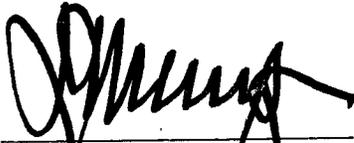
We are respectfully requesting your review and submission of a forthcoming application to build a VA clinic in the U.S. Territory of American Samoa. It is our understanding that the Veterans' Health Administration is presently reviewing its internal procedures for forwarding and/or submitting new applications to Congress for consideration. It is also our understanding that no new applications will be forwarded to Congress until this internal matter has been resolved. We have recently learned that the matter may be resolved by July at which time new applications will be sent forward.

We are supportive of your efforts to ensure that all states and areas of need are treated fairly and equitably and we commend you for your internal review of the application process for new clinic construction. As you are aware, American Samoa is a targeted area of need. More than 3,000 veterans live in the U.S. Territory but many needing assistance are not able to obtain proper medical care and treatment. In fact, veterans living in American Samoa currently must fly to the Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii for medical care.

Because medical facilities and resources are so limited in American Samoa, our collective offices have been working together to establish a VA medical clinic with a full-time physician in the Territory. This clinic would provide veterans in the Territory with the medical care they so urgently and critically need.

We would appreciate your timely and favorable review of this application which is scheduled to arrive in your office by mid-June. We would be most appreciative if you could expedite its review and forward the application to Congress for July consideration.

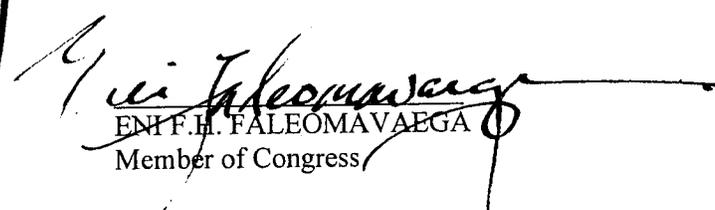
Sincerely,



DANIEL K. INOUE
U.S. Senator



DANIEL K. AKAKA
U.S. Senator



ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
Member of Congress



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

June 13, 2001

The Honorable Eni F. H. Faleomavaega
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5201

Dear Congressman Faleomavaega:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the possible establishment of a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinic in the United States Territory of American Samoa. I am sending this same response to Senator Akaka and Senator Inouye.

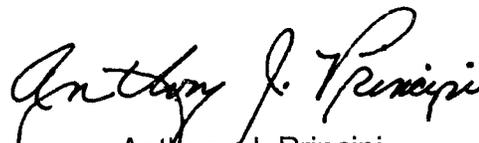
Improving access to health care services for all veterans is one of my highest priorities.

As you know, medical care for veterans residing in American Samoa comes under the jurisdiction of the VA Medical and Regional Office Center (VAMROC) in Honolulu, Hawaii. The staff at the Honolulu VAMROC are currently exploring a variety of options to improve access to care for veterans residing in American Samoa. They are reviewing demographics and assessing the needs of veterans in this area. The options that are developed will be evaluated on the basis of quality, accessibility and availability of resources.

As noted in your letter, VA is currently reviewing the criteria and guidelines used for the establishment of new community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs). If the Honolulu VAMROC concludes that a new CBOC in American Samoa is the best option, then its proposal will be forwarded through Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21 to VA Central Office for review. Any proposal from the VISN will receive full and complete consideration, based on our planning guidelines.

Thank you for your support for the veterans residing in American Samoa.

Sincerely yours,


Anthony J. Principi

RECEIVED
JUN 14 2001
WASHINGTON

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

FILE COPY

June 20, 2001

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to support the construction of a Veterans' medical clinic in the U.S. Territory of American Samoa. It is our understanding that the application for construction is being submitted at the end of this month by the Regional office in Honolulu, Hawaii. We are hopeful that you will also support this application and forward it to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs for July consideration.

As you are aware, American Samoa has limited medical facilities and no Veterans' clinic at present. However, at best estimate, more than 3,000 veterans now live in the Territory although only 1,000 of them have been duly registered with the Veterans' Administration. We think it is important to note that the registration process has been difficult due to limited local resources and skilled personnel. In November of 2000, a technical team visited the island to set up and test telcom connections to assist in the enrollment effort.

We are hopeful that as you consider this application for construction of a VA clinic in American Samoa you will consider the unique challenges and needs associated with the Territory. The U.S. Territory of American Samoa lies 2,300 miles south and west of Hawaii. The nearest VA facility to American Samoa is the Tripler Army Medical Center located in Honolulu. Veterans living in American Samoa must fly to Hawaii in order to receive proper medical care and treatment. However, many live without assistance due to the financial burden imposed by associated travel costs.

For those who qualify to travel on military aircraft, many are unable to do so due to the limited number of space available seats. With respect to commercial flights, Hawaiian Air is the only carrier in the Territory and flights in and out are only offered two times a week.

In addition to the problems associated with remoteness, travel and expense, the Territory also lacks fundamental medical facilities. The LBJ hospital in American Samoa is ill-equipped to meet the growing needs of the Territory. The hospital lacks physicians,

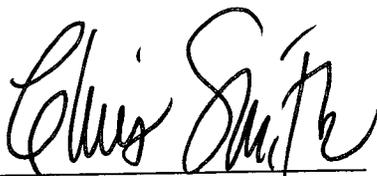
medicines, equipment, personnel, supplies, facilities and funding. In short, the LBJ hospital is not in a position to meet its own needs. To expect it to meet the needs of more than 3,000 veterans is an unacceptable recourse.

We believe that veterans living in American Samoa should be offered the same services and benefits offered to those residing in other parts of the United States. We believe that no veteran should be left behind or without. This is why we believe the establishment of a VA clinic in American Samoa must be a critical and urgent priority of the Veterans' Administration.

We are hopeful that you will support our efforts and would be most appreciative of your timely and favorable review of the forthcoming application due in your office at the end of June. We would also appreciate your assistance in forwarding the application to Congress for July consideration.

We would also like to thank you for the service you render and commend you for your efforts to ensure that all states and areas of need are treated fairly and equitably in the process.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs



LANE EVANS
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs



ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
Member of Congress



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON
August 8, 2001

RECEIVED

AUG 13 2001

WASH. OFFICE

The Honorable Eni F. H. Faleomavaega
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-5201

Dear Congressman Faleomavaega:

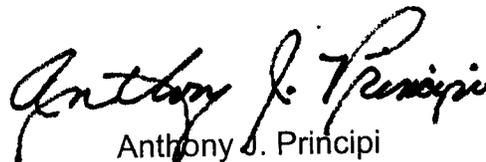
Thank you for your recent letter regarding the possible establishment of a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) clinic in the United States Territory of American Samoa. I am sending this same response to Chairman Smith and Ranking Democratic Member Evans of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

As you know, medical care for veterans residing in American Samoa comes under the jurisdiction of the VA Medical and Regional Office Center (VAM&ROC) in Honolulu, Hawaii. I have been informed that the staff of the Honolulu VAM&ROC have explored a number of options and are developing a proposal for a possible new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Samoa. The proposal is still under review in Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 21, which is responsible for the Honolulu VAM&ROC. I understand that Dr. Robert Wiebe, Director, VISN 21, discussed the situation and the various options with you at a meeting on July 17. Dr. Wiebe agreed to keep you informed as options are further developed.

Improving access to health care services for all veterans is one of my highest priorities. At my direction, the Veterans Health Administration is currently reviewing the criteria and guidelines used for the establishment of new CBOCs. Our goal is to improve consistency in the way we plan and operate CBOCs, with emphasis on quality, accessibility and availability of resources. Since the Samoa CBOC proposal is still under development and our planning guidelines are in the process of being updated, we are not able to commit to any particular plans for Samoa at this time. However, I can assure you that any proposal from VISN 21 will receive full and complete consideration based on our planning guidelines.

As always, I appreciate your continued support.

Sincerely yours,


Anthony J. Principi



AMERICAN SAMOA GOVERNMENT
PAGO PAGO, AMERICAN SAMOA 96799
LEGISLATURE OF AMERICAN SAMOA

In reply refer to:

CERTIFICATION

Senate Chamber
March 28, 2001

I certify that Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 27-9 passed on this date in the Senate during its First Regular Session of the Twenty seventh Legislature of American Samoa.

Leo'o V. Ma'o
SECRETARY OF THE SENATE

House Chamber
March 29, 2001

I certify that Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 27-9 passed on this date in the House during its First Regular Session of the Twenty seventh Legislature of American Samoa.

Fialupe Lutu
CHIEF CLERK, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**THE TWENTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE
FIRST REGULAR SESSION**

S.C.R. NO. 27-9

SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

**A SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION REQUESTING THE
SETTING OF A UNITED STATES VETERAN MEDICAL CLINIC IN
THE TERRITORY OF AMERICAN SAMOA.**

WHEREAS, *veterans from the Territory of American Samoa have served in the United States Armed Forces for over 100 years; and*

WHEREAS, *these veterans from the Territory of American Samoa have served valiantly to protect freedoms throughout the world and also to fight against the enemies of the United States of America; and*

WHEREAS, *thousands of these veterans have returned back to the Territory to live and to contribute in the growth and development of the economical and political structure of the Territory; and*

WHEREAS, *there are approximately 3000 of these veterans who have returned but only 1000 of them have been duly registered with the Veterans Administration; and*

WHEREAS, *because medical facilities and resources in the Territory of American Samoa are so limited, veterans needing medical assistance are not able to obtain proper medical care and treatment; and*

WHEREAS, *many of these veterans have been denied assistance from veteran's program either because of the great distance from the nearest veteran medical clinic or because of the limited transportation to these medical clinics; and*

WHEREAS, *these Samoan veterans deserve to take full benefit of veterans programs offered for veterans in other states and territories,*

including availability of a veterans hospital or medical facility on island; but are not able to fully take advantage of these programs at the present time due to the remote location of the Territory; and

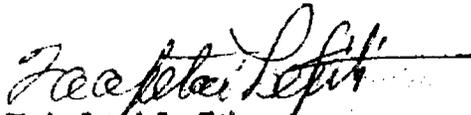
WHEREAS, *it is imperative that the Veteran's Administration should construct a Veteran's Medical Clinic in the Territory of American Samoa so that the health care needs of our veterans are properly met.*

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE TERRITORY OF AMERICAN SAMOA, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING:

THAT, a request be made to the Veteran's Administration and to Congress, to provide sufficient funds and resources to construct and establish a Veteran's Medical Clinic in the Territory of American Samoa; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, *that copies of this resolution be presented to appropriate agencies of the Federal Government and Congress with the hope that a Veteran's Medical Clinic be duly established in the Territory of American Samoa as soon as possible; and*

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, *that the Secretary of the Senate is directed to transmit copies of this resolution to the Chairman of the United States Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs and also to the Chairman of the United States House of Representatives on Veteran's Affairs; the United States Secretary of the Department of Veteran's Affairs; United State Senator Daniel Akaka; Senator Daniel K. Inouye and Congressman Eni F.H. Faleomavaega.*


Fa'afetai Lefiti
PRESIDENT PRO-TEMPORE


Sivall Talavou Ale
VICE-SPEAKER OF THE
HOUSE