

**Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission  
Poplar Bluff Hearing - August 20, 2003  
Statement for the Record  
provided by Representative Jo Ann Emerson**

Mr. Chairman, I would like to welcome you to Poplar Bluff, Missouri, for this important hearing on the future of veterans health care in our region. I appreciate the Department's willingness to conduct public hearings on the future of veterans' health care, and I am thankful for the opportunity to provide written testimony on this issue.

First and foremost, I am pleased that the Draft National CARES plan does not appear to significantly alter the services provided in Poplar Bluff to the veterans throughout Southeastern Missouri. As you know, the John J. Pershing VA Medical Center serves 29 counties with a veterans population as high as 50,000. With such a large population of veterans in the region who utilize the essential services provided by this center on a daily basis, it is critical that the John J. Pershing Medical Center continue its operations. We must work diligently to guarantee our veterans the quality of care they so desperately need.

The rural nature of our area makes access to quality health care an issue for every veteran. The Pershing Medical Center has provided thousands of rural veterans with the opportunity to access quality health care that would be otherwise unavailable. In addition, the Pershing Medical Center supplies important referral services for those veterans who require more sophisticated care.

Mr. Chairman, I believe we have an obligation to our veterans to continue providing quality health care at little or no cost to the veteran population. Any reduction of services at this center would be a detriment to the health and welfare of our veterans, and would be an action I would vehemently oppose. By allowing the John J. Pershing Medical Center to continue providing essential health care services to veterans in our area, we will be fulfilling this obligation.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. I look forward to working together with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the CARES Commission on this issue to ensure veterans in our area continue to have access to quality care.