

GEORGE L. GILMAN
State Representative

DISTRICT 55



WHITE CITY

Committees:

Vice-Chair:

Agriculture and Natural
Resources

Member:

Transportation

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
900 COURT ST NE
SALEM, OREGON 97301

October 03, 2003

Subject: Testimony before VA's Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) commission.

For the record - my name is George L. Gilman. I am an Oregon State Representative for District 55. The VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics is located in District 55. My district includes all of Lake and Crook counties, the northern one-half of Klamath county and the northeastern one-third of Jackson county. All told **this district covers 15,450 square miles**. With the exception of Crook county all of the veterans in District 55 depend on the VA SORCC for service. With the current service level provided by SORCC a veteran traveling from Lakeview to White City would spend **4 hours, one way, in an automobile**. Any closure or reduction of service would very adversely affect veterans in this area.

Prior to my election to the state house of representatives I was a Foster Grandparent Director, which is a federally funded program with local financial support. The Foster Grandparent Program of southern Oregon matches seniors, sixty years and older, with children who need tutoring in a supervised setting. At least 50 men and women from the then "Dom" have participated in the program. Most were alcoholics in recovery. They not only remained sober, but moved from the "Dom" into our community illustrating another positive outcome for the facility. There are 50 success stories, but I will relate only one.

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Tom was a homeless vet living on the streets in Texas. He came to the White City "Dom" for help. After intensive in-patient treatment he was referred to the Foster Grandparent Program. by Louie Goldberg, a Clinical Social Worker at SORCC, and a ten year member of the Foster Grandparent Advisory Council. Tom volunteered at the county Juvenile Detention facility where he helped implement individual lesson plans for each of the young adults detained there. Tom remained sober - and untold troubled young adults learned to read and do their math. This wonderful partnership would be lost with the closure of VA SORCC.

Oregon has the unenviable position of having the highest unemployment rate in the nation. The 400+ jobs provided to southern Oregon would be lost if VA SORCC closed. Besides providing jobs, many of the SORCC employees serve on boards and commissions, such as the Foster Grandparent Program, helping to make Southern Oregon a better place to live.

I wish to thank the CARES Commission for coming to Southern Oregon and taking the time to listen to us. I am sure that what you hear today will convince you that the SORCC facility should remain open.

WHITE CITY

October 2, 2003

Department of Veterans' Affairs
Office of the Secretary

Attention: Richard E. Larson
Executive Director
CARES Commission

Sirs:

My Name is Bill Moore. I am a City Councilor for the City of Medford; a combat veteran of WWII, with a 20% service connected disability; and I worked at the VA Domiciliary from 1974 to 1988. I served most of my tenure at the VA Dom with the Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program, both as coordinator and as a counselor. I have worked in the field of A&D as a paid professional for over 30 years. Until recently, I have served on the Governor's Commission on Alcohol and Drugs.

In the early 1970 s the VA Dom was called upon to admit vets that had survived an earthquake in Southern California that had destroyed the VA facilities at Sawtell. The population of the VA Dom doubled to approximately 1200 patients. I recall this traumatic event to illustrate the VA Dom's ability to respond to a serious crisis and how its location and surplus of buildings are an important asset to the DVA health delivery system.

When I joined the VA Staff in the early 70's, the VA Dom was largely used as a warehouse for vets not needing acute care, but who were unable to be mainstreamed.

Shortly after the Hughes bill giving the VA the funds and direction to treat Substance Abuse, the VA Dom created an inpatient intensive e A&D Treatment program. The VA Dom began accepting veterans who had been rejected by other VA facilities because of patient history of treatment resistance, lack of social support system, and dual diagnosis of mental health and psychiatric disabilities.

The VA Dom established a multi-disciplinary treatment team to address the vets need^s and then to treat him or her holistically.

The VA Dom has also reached out and networked with other communities, the state, and community facilities to ensure a continuum of care.

Statistics tell us that 40%^{of} of the homeless population are veterans. A very high percentage of these are chemically dependent and are presenting with mental health and psychiatric disabilities. Because of the VA Dom's^m location, holistic approach, and long term care, treatment has been given to this population.

I quote one of the VA staff physicians who said, "Some one has to ^fscare for these people—jails, hospitals, courts. The VA Dom can do it more

economically and affectively than anyone else.” (Meaning State and Community facilities.)

~~The Dom has shown it can care for patients cheaper and more economically than any other like facility without compromising patient care.~~

The reason advanced for closing the Dom is that the buildings are not earthquake proof; however, one does not hear of earthquake statistics about White City. To my personal knowledge (I have lived in the Southern Oregon region for 53 years) there has not even been a tremor in White City during that time. One must balance the risk of earthquake against the provision of care for needy veterans on an efficient and economical basis. The answer is self-evident. The Dom must provide this care into the future.

Respectfully,

William H. Moore *CADCH*
NCACF

WHITE CITY

Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services Commission

Everett Alvarez, Jr.

Chairman, CARES Commission

and

Honorable Anthony J. Principi

Secretary, Veterans Affairs

Testimony by

Commissioner Sue Kupillas

Jackson County, Oregon

October 3, 2003

Let me get this straight.

Are you telling us that the federal government and Congress does not have resources to retrofit a few buildings that house one of the most important compassionate, necessary, and efficient federal institutions in the United States? The United States is creating veterans daily with the war in Iraq. What kind of message does this send to our enlisted men and women—if we refuse to take care of them, after they have risked their lives for our freedom from terrorists and terrorism?

Hello. My name is Sue Kupillas, Senior Member of the Jackson County Board of Commissioners, in Jackson County, Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics located in White City, Oregon. The mission of SORCC is to as a regional and national resource for under-served special populations, e.g. homeless, chronically mentally ill, and substance abuse, providing quality residential treatment in psychiatry, addictions, medicine, bio-psychosocial, physical, and vocational rehabilitation.

I have been working with our VA facility for many years, but actively since I was elected in 1988. I have always valued the rehabilitation facility for many reasons, but today I realize, a proposal to reduce services or shut it down has caused me grave concern. I know you have some numbers and stats, but those numbers do not tell the story about the many lives (approximately 81,000 in-patients alone) of veterans this facility has touched from the beginning. I will just focus on what is going on in recent years since I began working with the facility.

About the time I was elected county commissioner in 1988, Art Miltner, began the vocational services so our veterans, after rehabilitation, could gain employment and self sufficiency as they started a new life. In 1994 the facility achieved national recognition with the Hammer Award, two Carey Quality Awards and dual accreditation in Behavioral Health by the Rehabilitation Accreditation Commission. This facility will serve approximately 9,000 out-patients and over 10,000 United States veterans in the year 2003. I have been actively working with the White City area since I was elected to the local District 9 school board in 1980. In 1991 I started the Jackson County Urban Renewal project in White City to overcome blight and crime issues as well as issues with an unstable community. In the last 12 years we have changed the White City community, breathed new life into it, rebuilt infrastructure, and made White City a desirable place to live. Our industrial park is thriving with Kodak, Boise, CertainTeed, and hundreds of other manufacturing facilities. The SORCC has integrated into the community, as the Rogue Community College located on campus, and Eagle Point alternative school students implemented their programs on campus. The SORCC has become very much a part of the northern end of the valley—socially and economically—and has enhanced services for our community. I am an ardent supporter of the professionals that work on the SORCC campus, of the veterans that are served here, and of the hundreds of other employees who enjoy employment here. As a County Commissioner and as the Chair of the Urban Renewal Agency, I understand how the entire community fits together.

Let me try to explain. This facility fits into our community in these ways: 1) significant economic contribution; 2) support for our veterans; 3) regionally as part of a health care system; 4) vocational training and education; 5) a vision for the future.

1) The Economics are simple. The \$41 million annual budget is a significant part of our economy in Southwestern Oregon. We have no national defense industry and our forest industry, because of federal policies, has been reduced significantly. A significant sector in our economy is the medical industry. We have two major hospital systems--Asante and Providence--and a local Community Health care provider in several of our 11 communities in Jackson County. County services include County Health, Mental Health, and Veterans Services. Transfer payments from retired citizens plays a very significant role in our local economy. The retired veterans are a part of population growth. With over 1,200 in-patients and over 10,000 out-patients, this becomes a substantial part of our economy. Many of our doctors--including my fellow Jackson County Commissioner, Dr. David Gilmour--treat local retired veterans and refer them to the VA facility for their very expensive prescription drugs. The veterans have access to the medical and pharmaceutical requirements. SORCC is an integral piece of the continuum of care we have in Jackson County.

2) Having a quality rehabilitation and clinic facilities available for veterans who have incurred illness and injury while in the line of duty is JUST THE RIGHT THING TO DO. This facility has 755 beds for in-patient treatment, the only free standing residential facility in the United States. It serves a regional area including Klamath County, Lake County, Josephine County and even counties in Northern California. Should this facility close, literally thousands of veterans would have limitations on medical treatment and rehabilitation, and could become homeless. This seems inappropriate when we are sending thousands of our young men and women into war zones today. There needs to be a transition available to them after active duty, should they need it. It is just the right thing to do--to pay back those who were put in harms way to defend this

country.

3) The Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinic is part of the required medical system I outlined above, with two major hospitals, clinics, alcohol and drug treatment, and a local community health center. Jackson County funds a Veterans Outreach Office which assists veterans to get benefits due them. The Jackson County Health Department and Jackson County Veterans Services Office are a significant part of the service delivery system. These offices along with others work together to provide care for our senior citizens and veterans, as well as others needing medical care. The county could work with our local A&D providers and the VA to see how we could more effectively deliver services. The service delivery system is dependent on SORCC for providing affordable care for veterans.

4) The Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics have outstanding success in vocational training for our veterans. I was involved in getting Rogue Community College to extend their campus to the VA grounds, so our veterans could combine basic education and computer training with some of their practical grounds management classes. This has provided opportunity for over 1,700 veterans to succeed in not only recovery, but self sufficiency in our community and in communities all over the region. Our veterans are able to regain pride in achievement and overcome huge barriers as they continue their education. This service will be in more demand in the future.

There should be a bright future for this highly successful rehabilitation and training facility, as more troops come home from their active duty. Many will be ready to go back to civilian life,

but those who are not will find this facility waiting to assist them in the transition. I believe our community should work with the SORCC to develop more transition housing and expand the training and educational components. The reality is that our community needs the SORCC for economic and social reasons but looking at the larger picture, the United States needs this facility even more and the United States needs to live up to the promises and obligations made to our veterans. Keeping SORCC open and viable is a win/win solution, with in-patient and out-patient services and collaboration with the surrounding community. Our veterans have not let us down—now we cannot let them down.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue Kupillas