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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE U.S.

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DEPARTMENT OF OREGON

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## VA CARES HEARING

Friday, October 03, 2003 1300

Representative: Christopher C. Lanham Jr.

*Mr. Chairman and Commission members.*

*Sir,*

*On behalf of the, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the Department of Oregon I am privileged to appear here today, and we Welcome you to Oregon.*

The Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center & Clinics in White City was initially established as the Army's Camp White training site during World War II, it opened as a domiciliary on Feb. 20, 1949. The VA Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center & Clinics is the VA's only free standing Rehabilitation Center, and serves as a regional and national resource for the homeless, chronically mental ill, and substance abuse patients. It provides residential treatment in psychiatry, addictions, medicine, bio-psychosocial, physical and vocational rehabilitation. Primary outpatient medical and mental health care is provided to veterans living in

WHITE CITY

the Southern Oregon, Northern California area. It is estimated that 40% of inpatients come from outside the VISN20 area.

In 1982 participation and treatment began to transition from that of long term Domiciliary concept to a goal oriented rehabilitation philosophy to prepare the veteran patient for reentry into society. Programs available to veterans include education, (the VA in cooperation with Rogue Community College started a campus for veterans and staff members to earn college credits and also an alternative High School Diploma), job training, substance abuse treatment, a chronic pain clinic and a diabetes clinic.

While many short term 30 day type programs fail, or continue to retreat the veteran patients, White City's 9 month to 18 months programs, are focused on reintroducing the veteran into society. I reiterate that this is not a short term 30 day program that masks the real problem, but veterans are provided an opportunity to be reintroduced to society.

As an Independent rehabilitation center White City has the only free standing Rehabilitation Center for the homeless, chronically mentally ill, and substance abuse veteran patients. The facility provides quality health care based on excellence in client service. The facility provides veterans with individualized and compassionate care.

It is estimated that there is approximately 17,000 homeless veterans in VISN20. White City has Vocational rehabilitation services, compensated work therapy for transitional work therapy contracts and over 1700 homeless veterans have been employed.

Strategic planning of CARES initiatives established to streamline the health care of veterans should not inconvenience current health care provided to veterans at SORCC. *If* it is determined that the current facilities are not fit for use, then construction should begin immediately to house current requirement. A major capital investment proposal was established for FY 2004 funding at a cost of 30 million dollars. This proposal would remove several existing bed buildings and replace them with new construction of about 500 beds.

Two minor construction projections will be introduced in FY 2004. One project proposes to demolish two existing bed buildings and construct a new bed building to accommodate 80 beds. The project was approved by VISN20 to move forward.

The VA has given thought to eliminate health care for potentially thousands of America's veterans. In fact White City Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center & Clinics expect to serve over 10,000 veterans this year an increase of 11%. Over last year. The VFW supports CARES, (**Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Service**) but with reservations! We are concerned about the possible elimination of services at White City.

In a time when our President is seeking to provide more adequate health care to our homeless, mentally ill, and substance abuse veterans, White City sits as a model for the Nation.

As a note of record, the VFW's poppy program is almost entirely supported by the White City Facility, providing between 30 and 50 thousand poppies per year.

In some CARES proposals it has been recommended that DOD hospitals and clinics be utilized to streamline facility management. I would also like to see retired veterans be able to utilize the VA facilities as right rather than qualification.

In fact perhaps another category could be established to allow the retired veteran full health care as he or she was promised when the reenlisted and retired after twenty- plus years of service to our country.

Oregon does not have a military facility so the VA hospitals are a means of providing health care to the retired community.

Thank you.