

It's official - VA now a National Treasure

April 09, 2012 8:37 am • [By Curt Nettinga](#)

HOT SPRINGS - The thousands of veterans and hundreds of employees, past and present already knew it to be true, but now it's official.

The VA Black Hills Health Care System campus in Hot Springs, originally the Battle Mountain Sanitarium, has been named a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP).

Amanda Campbell, the Historic Preservation Chairperson for the Save the VA Campaign, said she received notice of the site's inclusion on Thursday.

"It's very exciting," Campbell said. "Nationwide there are only 22 sites that have been named as a National Treasure by the National Trust. What makes it even more special is that they nominated the site themselves."

Campbell said that normal procedure calls for a building or site to be vetted through a nomination process. In the case of the Battle Mountain Sanitarium - now the VA - the NTHP made the nomination.

In July of 2011, the VA site in Hot Springs was granted National Landmark status by the U.S. government. It had previously been recognized on the National Historic Register.

In 2009, the NTHP selected Hot Springs as one of the Dozen Distinctive Destinations.

"It is great that they recognize the significance of the site and the history that is here," Campbell added.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/it-s-official--va-now-a-national-treasure/article_b969a580-8251-11e1-9501-0019bb2963f4.html

D.C. Delegation coming to Hot Springs

April 09, 2012 8:34 am

HOT SPRINGS – All three South Dakota congressional representatives; Senators Tim Johnson and John Thune, as well as Representative Kristi Noem will host a public one-hour VA information-gathering session, beginning at 11 a.m., at the Hot Springs American Legion, on Thursday, April 12.

The legislators will tour the VA Black Hills Health Care Medical Center and Domiciliary that morning and will also have a short meeting with BHHCS director Steve DiStasio. They will then move to the Legion, where they will hear presentations from group leaders, highlighting the Save the VA Campaign's efforts to retain health care services for veterans at the longtime facility in Hot Springs.

For Noem, this will be her second visit to Hot Springs concerning the VA. She held a similar information-gathering session at the American Legion on Feb. 4.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/d-c-delegation-coming-to-hot-springs/article_3c0f9464-8251-11e1-ad54-0019bb2963f4.html

Hot Springs residents fight to keep the VA Hospital open

Thursday, 12 April 2012 16:46

Residents continue to voice their concerns over a proposal to close an area VA hospital. The Veterans Administration announced in December they needed to make cost-cutting changes to the organization.

One of the proposed measures: closing the VA Hospital in Hot Springs. Thursday, South Dakota's congressional delegation headed to Fall River County to hear residents' concerns for themselves. Welcome to Hot Springs, the Veterans Town, a town that's currently at the center of a battle. "We were built to heal, we were built to last, and we are national history." The VA Hospital is at the core of this fight. A declared National Historic Landmark, the hospital is slated to close, as part of a new plan proposed by the Veterans Administration to cut costs. But residents and South Dakota's congressional delegation seem skeptical, as the VA has not released any numbers to back their claim that closing the facility is financially necessary.

Rep. Kristi Noem says, "The amazing thing is that the VA doesn't have a cost benefit analysis for us. Any time you're going to propose something, you'd think you'd thought that forward a little bit before you put that out to a community as an actual proposal you're considering." So what's the price tag behind this proposed closure? It's a question many want answered. As the VA opens new facilities in urban areas, such as Denver and Omaha, residents want to know why rural communities and their veterans are the ones to suffer.

"Service members do what they're told ..." Sen. John Thune says, "The thing that's most frustrating to us in the delegation now is the VA has not produced a cost benefit analysis data that they use as a foundation to come to the decision they've come to." That's why residents have taken it upon themselves to create their own proposal, one that will keep the Hot Springs facility open. It's a proposal the delegation says they'll review, and encourage the VA to review as well.

Sen. Tim Johnson says, "The two big questions are the cost benefit analysis that has yet to come out on the VA's part and the cost benefit analysis should also apply to the community's alternative plan." The VA will continue an open comment period over the next few weeks, before coming to a final decision. Until then, residents of Hot Springs will wait to see if they will forever remain the Veterans Town.

Zach Nugent

<http://www.blackhillsfox.com/2012/04/12/Hot-Springs-residents-fight-to-keep-the-VA-Hospital-open>

SD Congressional leaders hear Hot Springs VA debate

Posted: Apr 12, 2012 5:54 PM MDT

By PJ Randhawa, Reporter

Hot Springs is the sight of the nation's first veterans hospital. And the VA continues to be the nucleus of the town.

So last year, when a plan was proposed plan to close the facility, the community rallied. But now, the fight to save the VA may have just gotten a leg up.

South Dakota's top political leaders toured the VA facility Thursday, and heard first hand what its closure would mean to the community in Hot Springs and far beyond.

"Piece by piece, doctor by doctor, they're dismantling Hot Springs," said Military Veteran Don Ackerman.

"Part of the cost of national security is caring for the people who wore the uniform and defended it," said US Senator John Thune.

It's that cost that puts the VA in danger of closure.

But even South Dakota's congressional delegates aren't seeing the proof that a closure would be cost effective.

Senator Tim Johnson said he would not rest until the questions of cost efficiency and how better quality care would be available to veterans were answered by the VA.

"The VA has not produced a cost benefit analytics or the data to make the decision that they've come to," said Thune.

"I specifically asked them for a cost benefit analysis on their proposals and any others that come forward," said Congressional Representative Kristi Noem.

The economic impact of losing the VA could be devastating for Hot Springs. One in six jobs could be on the line. But it's the quality of care for veterans that has many people fired up.

The VA has proposed contracting veteran care to smaller rural hospitals and clinics.

"Veterans only pay less than half for every service they get. We bankrupt small hospitals so veterans go to the back of the line," said Ackerman.

"I want to see financial statistics, how they're going to give them better health care, and how they're going to make it so accessible to veterans," said Noem.

A counter proposal is in the works to not only keep the hospital open but to expand its services. For don Ackerman, it's a fight to provide every veteran with a fighting chance to get the help they were promised.

"Every veteran we save, everyone we fix is better for our society," said Ackerman.

Roughly 40% of all veterans live in rural areas, including close to ten thousand veterans from Pine Ridge and Nebraska that rely on the Hot Springs facility for treatment.

A counter proposal is in the works to not only keep the hospital open but to expand its services. That proposal will be sent to Washington at the end of this month.

<http://www.kotatv.com/story/17402654/sd-congressional-leaders-hear-hot-springs-va-debate>

Johnson, Thune and Noem visit Hot Springs to discuss VA's future



April 13, 2012 6:00 am • [Curt Nettinga Hot Springs Star](#)

HOT SPRINGS – Sens. Tim Johnson and John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem pledged to standing-room-only crowd Wednesday to get answers to questions the Save the VA Campaign has surrounding the possible closing of medical facilities in Hot Springs that serve veterans.

Paul Nabholz, the campaign’s validation committee chairman, told lawmakers that his committee had been “largely unable to do our job as the VA has simply not provided enough information to either validate or challenge.”

Nabholz said the VA’s inability to respond to questions has been frustrating.

“They have prepared a proposal that will affect so many lives and not produced a single document to support that proposal. Would this be acceptable in any business?” he asked. “Certainly not those with which I have been involved. I hope it is not acceptable to our congressional delegation,” Nabholz said.

The three lawmakers agreed that getting a cost/benefit analysis on the VA’s proposal was the first item of business as the process moves forward.

The campaign was formed after the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced in December that it was considering a plan to transfer many treatment and care options from outdated facilities in Hot Springs to private providers, as well as to expanded and improved VA facilities and programs at Rapid City and Sturgis.

Since then, the community of Hot Springs has waged a fierce campaign to keep the more than century-old facility open.

Thune offered the group some advice.

“It will need to show that first-rate care for veterans is the prime issue, while at the same time show that it can be done in the most cost effective manner here in Hot Springs,” he said.

Thune said he met with staff members at the VA during a tour of the site and noted that “caring for veterans is not a job for them – it is a mission and one which they take very seriously.”

For more than an hour at the American Legion Hall, South Dakota’s congressional delegation heard of the battles being waged by the Save the VA Campaign.

Johnson, Thune and Noem said they were overwhelmed by the community’s support for the campaign.

Johnson said he marveled at the “passion and commitment of the community” to ensure the care of veterans, while pledging to “continue to push for answers to questions still not answered.”

“The community support shown here today and the intensity of that support speak volumes,” he said. “More than 200,000 returning soldiers will be seeking treatment for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and they will need facilities to provide that care.”

“You do a great job of showing your support here,” Noem said. “We will continue to press the VA for answers. They have not shown that they will give better care.”

“I appreciate you putting your heart and souls into this,” Noem said.

Amanda Campbell, who chairs the campaign’s Historical Preservation Committee, told the lawmakers that “we are national history here,” referencing last year’s designation of the Battle Mountain Sanitarium as a National Historic Landmark and the announcement that the site is now listed as a National Treasure by the National Trust of Historic Preservation.

“This morning I received this message from the National Trust,” Campbell said. “It recognizes the first-class medical care that has been provided at this facility for more than 100 years and states that the National Trust is committed to the complete rehabilitation of the VA buildings to meet the health care needs of veterans.”

“What this means is that they have joined our fight and that we just added a much bigger soldier to our ranks,” she said. “Veterans have been healed here since the Civil War.”

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/johnson-thune-and-noem-visit-hot-springs-to-discuss-va/article_e80c0ac6-8513-11e1-a65b-001a4bcf887a.html

Counter Proposal To VA Closure

KOTA RADIO 1380

Created: 4/13/2012 7:17:03 AM

Plans proposed last year to close the VA hospital in Hot Springs caused a firestorm from residents, and veterans in the region.

South Dakota's congressional delegation toured the facility on Thursday, and heard from residents what closing the facility would mean for the town. Senator Thune says that part of the cost of national security is caring for those who have worn the uniform, but it's that cost that puts the VA in danger of closure.

While the hospital is a large employer for the town, and the loss of jobs is worrisome, it's the possible drop in quality in veteran care that has residents and veterans just as concerned. The VA has proposed contracting veteran care to smaller rural hospitals and clinics. Veteran representative Don Ackerman...

But even South Dakota's congressional delegates aren't seeing the proof that a closure would be cost effective. Senator Tim Johnson said he would not rest until the questions of cost efficiency and how better quality care would be available to veterans were answered by the VA. Congresswoman Noem said that she wants to see the final statistics.

For Ackerman, it's a fight to provide every veteran with a fighting chance to get the help they were promised...

Roughly 40% of all veterans live in rural areas, including close to ten thousand veterans from Pine Ridge and Nebraska that rely on the Hot Springs facility for treatment.

The counter proposal will be sent to Washington at the end of this month.

<http://www.kotaradio.com/news.asp?eid=5002&ID=11060>

Proposal to save the Hot Springs VA ready for Washington

Posted: Apr 26, 2012 2:55 PM MDT

By PJ Randhawa, Reporter -

Ever since a proposal was put forth to downsize the Hot Springs veterans hospital in December, community members have been hard at work to make sure that doesn't happen.

Now, a counter- proposal from the community.

It details a plan to keep the hospital open and it will be in Washington by Monday.

Hot Springs VA administrators say their proposal to downsize the hospital is in the best interest of patient quality and safety.

But members of the Save the VA Committee say there are serious questions about the quality and legitimacy of research behind the hospitals proposal.

In the peaceful town of Hot Springs, the battle to save the veterans hospital is finally reaching a tense turning point.

"I think what they're feeling is a lot of uncertainty about what will be happening," said Patrick Russell, President of the American Federation of government employees, representing employees of the Hot Springs VA medical center.

Russell represents more than 3,000 VA hospital workers. As part of the save the VA committee, Russell and other believes their efforts to keep the VA open are being undercut by hospital administrators.

"We've heard continually, this is only a proposal.,, not a done deal, but recently if we look at what's happening, they're continually to transfer jobs, close things down," said Hot Springs Mayor, Don De Vries.

Hospital director Steve Distasio told KOTA in a phone interview that those transfers and closures could be attributed to the need to maintain the best quality of care for patients.

But not everyone is convinced.

"What we've discovered through FIOA requests is that some of the data that they relied upon was not completely accurate. The number of vets on pine ridge, the number of patients being treated in the inpatient unit," said Russell.

Details of the committee's counter proposal are being kept in strict confidence for the time being.

"We're not going to release any information based on the facts, because they fail to put factual information out there like we do," said veteran and committee member Don Ackerman.

"We might not be able to propose something properly if there's already work done to destroy our proposal before we've ever made it public," said De Vries.

The committee says in the next few months they'll seek national exposure for the plight of the VA. And their focus will be narrow.

"We're fighting a battle to save the VA, not to save Hot Springs. That's critical. Once they start outsourcing, the VA is gone," said Ackerman.

Distasio says he's open to looking at any new research and engaging in a community discussion about the proposal.

He says a cost analysis report of the downsizing proposal is currently being developed.

A senate committee in Washington has been inquiring into patient care in VA hospitals. Senators say the VA is failing to meet its own mandates for timeliness and patient care. VA officials say they plan to hire 1,900 mental health works to reduce wait times.

<http://www.kotatv.com/story/17795905/hot-springs-va-counter-proposal-headed-to-washington>

Hot Springs Residents Fight for VA

Dakota Digest - 04/16/2012

South Dakota's congressional delegation visited Hot Springs last week to listen to the concerns of local residents over plans to close the town's Veterans Affairs Medical Facility. A standing room only crowd filled the local American Legion Hall as residents expressed strong opposition to a plan to reduce VA health care services in Hot Springs. SDPB's Charles Michael Ray attended the meeting. He spoke with town residents and VA officials and put together today's Dakota Digest.

Anyone taking a drive through Hot Springs can't help but notice scores of signs, on businesses in front yards and on street corners, and they all have one similar message "Save our VA" The US Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest employer in this town of roughly four-thousand. VA medical facilities are perched above town, overlooking sandy cliffs and warm waters of the Fall River. The gorgeous sandstone buildings, include the Battle Mountain Sanatorium. It's housed veterans for over century. The National Trust on Historic Preservation labeled the facility a National Treasure. Locals here will tell you that Veterans Care is part of this community's DNA. And those like Amanda Campbell won't let it go without a fight.

"We have healed from the Civil War from all the wars in-between up to the war in the Middle East. We are Battle Mountain, we are Hot Springs we were built to heal, we were built to last and we are National History, says Campbell to roaring applause from the crowd.

Campbell is one of a litany of speakers front of a packed crowd that is spilling out the doors of the local American Legion Hall.

One of the locals leading the effort to save VA medical services is Don Ackerman. He's a Vietnam Veteran and like others at this meeting, Ackerman is very angry both over this proposal and over the way it was brought about--and he doesn't mince his words.

"To take this away from our veterans and to leave them standing with nothing, the people that put this proposal together should be incarcerated and the keys thrown away for what they're trying to do," says Ackerman.

Ackerman's take here highlights the amount of passion in this community. Officials with the VA say they understand local residents concerns. But their goal is to make sure they meet the needs of all veterans in the Black Hills region. Stephen DiStasio is the Director of the VA Black Hills Health Care System. He says the proposal includes spreading out VA care and moving some services to Rapid City, which may appeal to a wider range of vets.

"Particularly our young vets I think are looking for better education better jobs they want family support services and so we're watching that trend very closely on and we're beginning to do the thought process of how will that effect the location of our facilities." says DiStasio.

DiStasio says under the proposal Hot Springs patient services are spread out, some end up in a new local facility and some are contracted out to the local town hospital. DiStasio says veterans would receive the same care--just sometimes from a non-VA facility. But many at the meeting in the American Legion don't believe it.

"No that'd be a slap in the face a kick in the butt if they closed it," says Frank Marshall a Lakota Vietnam Vet.

The Hot Springs VA serves a large number of Native American Veterans. Marshall worries about the price of gas and the possibility of having to drive much further to get the same care.

"And that hardship is going to pass on down to the family not just the Veteran," says Marshall.

Marshall looks up from his chair at the giant crowd gathered in Hot Springs, his eyes get wet and he chokes up.

"Look at this, they're our support. I'm sorry I feel strongly about this," says Marshall.

South Dakota's congressional delegation listened to a long list of comments at the meeting. Senators Thune, Johnson and Congresswoman Noem all called for a cost benefit analysis of the VA proposal before any changes are made. Here's Senator Thune.

"We've got to think long and hard ladies and gentlemen about we can best provide the services that the tax payers in this country are paying for and this about the debt and the fiscal responsibility we have as stewards of those tax dollars to do things in the best possible most cost effective and most efficient way," says Thune.

Locals are critical of the VA for failing to make a cost benefit analysis public. They say that Hot Springs could lose up to 250 or more jobs if local VA facilities are closed. Vietnam Vet Don Ackerman says closing the VA would devastate this community. But he adds that this is more about cost effective access to local health care for veterans.

"This is not about Hot Springs this is about the veteran we know and we can prove we can do it cheaper here, we can do it better here, but bottom line is if they can do it better cheaper anywhere else that'd be fine with us. The veterans are first," says Ackerman.

VA officials say the current proposals are not set in stone. Stephen DiStasio says the VA is listening to the concerns of Veterans and locals in Hot Springs.

"We've reinforced repeatedly that this is just a proposal there have been no decision made. They are coming in the future. But what VA is really looking for is that dialogue and certainly we want to hear about concerns from our Veterans and other stakeholders, but it is only a proposal," says DiStasio.

In the middle of the crowd at the American Legion Hall those like Don Ackerman are confident the proposal to close the Hot Springs VA, will die before it comes to fruition.

"I'd bet you next six months paycheck against one of mine," laughs Ackerman.

VA officials say they're taking public comments on the proposal through the end of this month.

<http://www.sdpb.org/newsite/shows.aspx?MediaID=60641&Parmltype=RADIO&ParmAccessLevel=sdpb-all>



EDITORIAL: VA stalls on releasing information

April 17, 2012 7:30 am • [Journal editorial board](#)

South Dakota's congressional delegation toured the Hot Springs VA center last week and made a joint appearance before a standing-room-only crowd eager to learn more about the Department of Veterans Affairs' proposal to close most of the VA facilities in Hot Springs.

The lawmakers answered questions and pledged to push the VA into releasing a cost/benefit analysis of the VA's plan.

To which we respond: The VA hasn't done a cost/benefit analysis yet?

The VA's proposal to close most of its facilities in Hot Springs and move them to Rapid City or Fort Meade was announced Dec. 12. Yet four months later, the VA still hasn't released a cost/benefit analysis.

The VA said in December that moving treatment centers to Rapid City, Sturgis and to private providers would save the VA money and bring facilities closer to more area veterans. How does the VA know that the proposal will save money and improve care for veterans if it hasn't released a cost/benefit analysis? Did the VA do any analysis of its proposal before announcing it?

The Save the VA Campaign in Hot Springs told Sens. Tim Johnson and John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem that it still has not received much of the information it has requested from the VA. The delegation wrote to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki on Jan. 4 asking for more information, and sent another letter in March asking to extend the public comment period because the VA wasn't answering questions.

The VA has extended the comment period and is answering some document requests, but it continues to stall. The fact that a cost/benefit analysis is not available or was never done calls into question the VA's justification for its Black Hills Health Care System consolidation proposal.

The VA has been a welcome part of the Black Hills community in Hot Springs and Fort Meade for more than a century, but its behavior in failing to provide information and data to support its plan to close facilities is not what we expect from public servants.

We asked our congressional delegation to become involved, and we are grateful that Sens. Johnson and Thune and Rep. Noem have joined forces to represent the Hot Springs community and area veterans in dealing with the VA.

In our view, the VA should suspend its plans for the Hot Springs VA center until it releases all information, including its long-delayed cost/benefit analysis.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/opinion/editorial-va-stalls-on-releasing-information/article_ffd36ea-880c-11e1-a209-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1sRPsU2UN

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KENT: Keeping veterans' trust

April 19, 2012 6:30 am • [Jim Kent Journal columnist](#)

“Trust” is one of those words used frequently with little regard for its meaning: “reliance on the integrity, strength, ability of a person or thing; confidence.”

This thought came to mind as I stood in the Hot Springs American Legion Hall recently to witness the “historic” gathering of South Dakota’s U.S. congressional delegation. Historic because it was the first time all three members of the delegation had visited Hot Springs at the same time.

Hmm ...

The trio was in town to hear comments on the “proposed” dismantling of the Veterans Affairs’ medical facility in Hot Springs — a health care center that has served veterans across the region for more than a century.

While I listened to Native Americans and non-Natives stand before Sen. Tim Johnson, Sen. John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem to express their anger, outrage and disillusionment with the VA’s plan to immobilize medical services at this Southern Hills site, I recalled the phrase “nation to nation” and wished Lakota elder Oliver Red Cloud could have been present to lend his voice to the proceedings.

For more than a decade, at countless meetings between the Lakota people and federal agencies, I’d heard Oliver use his favorite catch-phrase to sternly remind the federal government of its responsibility to his people per the Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868: nation to nation.

Oliver referred to the trust assumed between any two countries that sign a treaty, and the presumption by both sides that the conditions of that treaty will be met. In Oliver’s case, the trust noted was between the Sioux nation and the United States. Most Lakota Sioux will readily offer their opinion on just how well that nation-to-nation relationship has fared for their people over the years: rather dismally.

Of course, non-Natives don’t need to have a treaty with their government to ensure trust between them and their nation’s leaders. It’s part and parcel of our citizenship, isn’t it? Hardly.

One would hope, however, that the federal government could be trusted to care for the men and women who’ve assisted in maintaining its very existence these many years: those who serve in the military and those fortunate enough to return home from that service.

Apparently not, or veterans in the area and their supporters wouldn’t need to petition non-government entities like the National Trust for Historic Preservation to assist them in fighting the VA’s plan to eradicate its medical facility at Hot Springs — designated a National Historic Landmark in 2011. The trust has noted its commitment to a long-term campaign to ensure that

the historic VA buildings at Hot Springs are rehabilitated and continue to meet the health care needs of veterans.

Now if those veterans can maintain that same level of support from South Dakota's congressional delegation, the battle to preserve the century-old site just might be won.

As I watched the overflow crowd gathered at the American Legion Hall, I was impressed by the unity shown between Natives and non-Natives, Native veterans and non-Native veterans, young and old. The level of trust was palpable.

The only point of trust I question is Sen. Thune's comment about the "best use of tax dollars" in addressing this issue. I can't help but feel uneasy about a statement that harkens to the mindset of those politicians who think little about what it costs the taxpayer to send our young men and women into battle (nearly \$4 trillion since 2001), but suddenly shift their budgetary course when the time arrives to care for those same warriors.

Trust? Call it nation to veteran.

Jim Kent lives in Hot Springs. Write to kentvfte@gwtc.net.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/opinion/kent-keeping-veterans-trust/article_d516de98-899e-11e1-9611-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1sXTg8axS

Brenda Gamache - OPINION

April 24, 2012 3:30 am

To the Editor:

I was very happy to see our community in Hot Springs support our vets. I can't imagine giving time to go overseas and protect our country and to come back with mental anguish, physical loss and financial hardship and feel regret that the government was not willing to give them a place that is peaceful and caring to get their lives back in order, instead of making them be a part of a cold and bureaucratic system.

These men and women have suffered for duty to our country and will continue to suffer from their service in anguish the rest of their lives. I, in my lifespan, have known many.

I owe and respect them for their call of duty.

I would like to request to the citizens, to take time to call our appointed voices on April 27, to remind them that we need their support to keep the VA Center in Hot Springs alive.

Call Senator Tim Johnson at 1-800-537-0025; Senator John Thune at 1-866-850-3855 or Representative Kristi Noem at 1-855-225-2801.

Remember to call on April 27, and let your voice be heard for veterans

Brenda Gamache

Hot Springs

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/brenda-gamache---opinion/article_fee46efe-8d6b-11e1-bcb3-001a4bcf887a.html

VA Campaign appreciative of community, delegation's efforts

April 24, 2012 3:30 am

HOT SPRINGS – When the Veterans Administration announced its proposal to close the Hot Springs VA last December, the community of Hot Springs came together, like never before, to try and preserve the veterans' health care it has been perfecting for more than a century.

That united effort was never more evident than earlier this month when the community hosted the entire South Dakota U.S. Congressional Delegation on April 12 for a listening session at the Hot Springs American Legion.

Throughout the town – leading up to and on that date – signs of patriotism and support for our nation's veterans was on full display. Red, white and blue ribbon was hung all around town and on the bridge leading to the American Legion; and, painted signs adorned street corners downtown and on fifth street leading up to the VA grounds.

More than 600 people filled to capacity the American Legion that day to hear the Save the VA Campaign tell the U.S. Congressional leaders about their fight, while asking for their continued support in that fight.

It was an event made possible by help from the entire community, and Pat Russell, a member of the Executive Group of the Save the VA Campaign said they are very thankful to the community for their efforts over the past few months.

“We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all the citizens, veterans, families and school children who supported the Save the VA Campaign at the meeting with the Congressional Delegation on April 12,” said Pat Russell, member of Executive Group of the Save the VA Campaign. “The community rose to the occasion to show their support for our veterans and their VA Medical Center.”

The town's effort also left a big impression on the delegation who attended.

“Clearly by the attendance at the town hall and the feedback I have gotten since the VA made their announcement, the Hot Springs community is dedicated to helping Veterans,” said Sen. John Thune. “I have been impressed by the energy and enthusiasm the community has shown in efforts to retain services in Hot Springs.”

Rep. Kristi Noem, who was making her second stop in Hot Springs since the announcement was made last December, was once again impressed with the community and its united effort to keep the Hot Springs VA open.

“The folks in Hot Springs have put their heart and souls into saving their Veterans Center, and their support is truly compelling,” said Rep. Noem. “It is overwhelming to see an entire community so committed to providing the best possible care and services to our veterans. Unfortunately, the VA has provided half answers and has yet to even do a cost-benefit analysis. The Hot Spring community and the veterans served deserve more, and I will continue pressing for answers.”

Sen. Tim Johnson was also impressed and vowed to work side-by-side with the community to ensure its concerns for veterans are heard.

“You can’t help but be impressed by how the community has come together around this issue and that was certainly evident the day of our visit,” Sen. Johnson said. “Their passion for the veterans is clear. Save the VA is diligently developing a counter-proposal, and I will work with them to ensure the VA gives it all due consideration. I commend everyone in the community for their passion and commitment.”

Russell stated previously that while the first phase of the Save the VA Campaign is completed, plenty of work still remains to be done.

“This is a marathon,” Russell said recently. “We just completed the sprint portion and now its time for the long jog. We need to sell our plan and get the word out. We can slow down now, but the work is not over.”

For more information on how to join a Save the VA Campaign Committee, contact Karen Meston at 745-5054.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/va-campaign-appreciative-of-community-delegation-s-efforts/article_58296e50-8d77-11e1-b036-001a4bcf887a.html#ixzz1t6awZh68

Don't slam the door just yet

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By Dusty Pence

David Rooks' maudlin cry over his presumed demise of our beloved Hot Springs in the Rapid City Journal was overwrought and premature. I don't dispute that the outlook for our VA is dismal. I do dispute his contention that this will "shutter" our town.

Towns experience ups and down—sometimes change races like a stomach-tumbling rollercoaster, sometimes it ripples like a highway coursing over gently rolling hills. If a town isn't changing, it is stagnant. Thus is the nature of towns, economies, the weather, the stock market and life.

Will Hot Springs suffer if the VA should close? Certainly. Some lives will be disrupted, some people will have to move, and the upheaval will be both painful and sad.

But this is hardly a death knell. It is a bump in the road of life, albeit a big one, and like most of life's bumps, some good will likely come of it.

Rooks talks about our town as if it exists only at the whim of a giant sugar daddy from Washington. Yet the very day that Rooks' column appeared, I spoke to a real estate agent about the houses that are selling here in our hometown. Newcomers, the agent told me, don't come for the VA. They come for the weather, the mountains, the prairie, and the sandstone buildings. They come for the peace and the quiet.

What will become of Hot Springs if the VA closes? We can't be sure. Much will stay the same. Much will change. The new State Home will stir up some excitement and something will have to be done with the beautiful Battle Mountain site. I can picture a corporate headquarters there, complete with cafeteria and parks. What a wonderful site for a college campus! And while I heard that audible gasp when folks learned that the feds had toyed with the idea of selling our VA to the city for a jail, I must tell you that I have never heard a peep of complaint from my cousins in Yankton, who have lived for years just a few blocks from the minimum security prison in the heart of their community.

The Battle Mountain site could serve veterans in a new capacity. Why not establish an old-fashioned resort for veterans and active-duty military alike, a peaceful place to unwind with their families, complete with sweat lodge, B&Bs and simple lodge-style rooms? Add a spa. Run a bus to Angostura for recreation and into town for shopping and dining. Or the site could simply be a unique national park—perhaps with museums, interpretive centers and campsites.

In other words, the possibilities are endless.

I have long believed that Hot Springs' economic future lies to the north. One only has to look to Hermosa to see Rapid City creeping southward. When people move, industry gradually finds its way to the people. Who would object to a commute from Hot Springs to a factory or office in Hermosa? It would be faster and far less stressful than the typical Minneapolis or Denver commute.

Let's not write Hot Springs' obituary. Let's not play the victim. Instead, let's think about how we can promote our beautiful town and our amazing climate as the refuge from the city that it already is for so many—with or without a Washington sugar daddy.

Dorothy Jean (Dusty) Pence is a South Dakota native and fourteen-year resident of Fall River County. She is a writer and editor, with business, political, journalism and promotional experience. She edited Mary Ellen Goulet's *Cascade of Flames* and *A (not so) Simple Life*, and co-authored Boyer Palmer's *It's Been One Hell of a Ride*.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/don-t-slam-the-door-just-yet/article_23b38f9c-8d6e-11e1-a70e-001a4bcf887a.html