

Meeting set with Sect. Shinseki

January 15, 2013 12:15 am

Call for letters to be taken and delivered

HOT SPRINGS - Save the VA is sending several committee members to Washington, D.C. to meet with the Secretary of the VA, Eric Shinseki, on Jan. 28. This is a very important opportunity for SVA to impress on the Secretary how much the community cares about veterans and the Hot Springs VA, and how much Hot Springs opposes the VA's plans to eliminate a major portion of the services the VA provides.

Although many people have already written many letters, this visit affords the Save the VA group the opportunity to hand-deliver messages directly to Secretary Shinseki. The more letters, the better.

If you would like your letter to be among those delivered, please do one of the following:

- Mail your letter to Save the VA, PO Box 851, Hot Springs, SD, 57747.
- Drop your letter off at the Chamber of Commerce at the Mueller Center, 801 S. 6th St.
- Send your letter via e-mail to savetheva@gmail.com.

Visit www.theveteranstown.com for ideas and information on letter writing.

Letters should include the writer's name, mailing address, and e-mail address. Please submit letters before January 26.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/meeting-set-with-sect-shinseki/article_1d48180e-5e64-11e2-8f21-001a4bcf887a.html

Key meeting on fate of Hot Springs VA scheduled for Monday in Washington, D.C.

January 24, 2013 9:30 am • [Kevin Woster Journals taff](#)

South Dakota Sen. Tim Johnson is organizing a meeting in Washington, D.C. on Monday with U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki and others on the fate of the VA medical center in Hot Springs.

The meeting is expected to include Save the VA Committee members from Hot Springs, Sen. John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem and state officials, probably including Gov. Dennis Daugaard.

Johnson staffers declined to discuss the meeting with the Journal on Wednesday. More information is likely today.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/key-meeting-on-fate-of-hot-springs-va-scheduled-for/article_681fe028-6643-11e2-a9e0-0019bb2963f4.html

SD officials, others to make case Monday for Hot Springs VA facility

WASHINGTON, D.C. — South Dakota's four top officials, along with a Nebraska senator, will present a united front next week on keeping a Veteran Administration hospital and other facilities fully open in Hot Springs.

Sens. Tim Johnson, a Democrat, John Thune, a Republican, Rep. Kristi Noem, R-S.D., Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Sen. Mike Johanns, R-Neb., as well as representatives of the Save the VA Group will meet with Veterans Administration Secretary Eric Shinseki to discuss the future of VA facilities in Hot Springs.

Last fall, Eric Shinseki offered to have the South Dakota officials and their supporters meet with a VA undersecretary. That was rejected, and the South Dakota delegation said they wanted to meet with Eric Shinseki. The meeting will be an opportunity for the Save the VA Group to present their proposal for the Hot Springs VA directly to Secretary Shinseki and share with him their concerns with the VA's current proposal.

The Veterans Administration has proposed to significantly downsize their presence in Hot Springs. That was first announced in late 2011. The facility treats veterans from South Dakota as well as parts of Nebraska and Wyoming. Opponents of the reduction in services claim it would force veterans to seek care in facilities far from the current location, and would also mean some would be treated by public health care facilities without the experience and expertise of working with veterans.

The South Dakota delegation opposes this proposal and will be seeking to have the secretary make changes to accommodate the concerns of the Save the VA Group. Representing the Save the VA Group will be Pat Russell, Bob Nelson, Rich Gross, Don Ackerman and Amanda Campbell. All are from Hot Springs. The meeting will take place on Monday afternoon in the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

<http://www.mitchellrepublic.com/event/article/id/75348>



MOUNT BLOGMORE: Waiting for the VA meeting in Johnson's House

January 28, 2013 11:56 am • [Kevin Woster Journal staff](#)

The fate of the Hot Springs VA could be determined in large part by the outcome of a meeting today in Sen. Tim Johnson's office in D.C.

There's quite a bunch of expected participants:

Pat Russell, Bob Nelson, Rich Gross, Dan Ackerman and Amanda Campbell were supposed to be there, directly representing Hot Springs and the save-the-VA effort there.

Then there's VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, Assistant Secretary Joan Mooney, Deputy Undersecretary for Heath Bill Schoenhard and regional director Jan Murphy.

After that comes Gov. Dennis Daugaard, Nebraska Sen. Mike Johanns, possibly the Wyoming senators, and our Rep. Kristi Noem and Sen. John Thune.

OK, who am I forgetting?

Let's see.

Tick...tick...tick.

Oh yeah, TJ.

It's Tim Johnson's House, and Tim Johnson's show. The meeting happened because Johnson wanted it to happen.

He's the big heat in the room today, given his spot on appropriations subcommittee covering VA.

What comes next, or doesn't, is in Johnson's hands more than anybody else in the room.

Except Shinseki, of course.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/blog/blogmore/mount-blogmore-waiting-for-the-va-meeting-in-johnson-s/article_24a1d5ee-1b43-5440-9109-8412b7577aea.html

Delegation, Save The VA Committee meet with Secretary Shinseki in Washington

January 28, 2013 4:40 pm

WASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. Senators Tim Johnson (D-SD), John Thune (R-SD), U.S. Representative Kristi Noem (R-SD), South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard, and representatives of the Save the VA Group today met with VA Secretary Eric Shinseki to discuss the future of VA facilities in Hot Springs, South Dakota.

Pat Russell, Bob Nelson, Dr. Rich Gross, Don Ackerman, and Amanda Campbell represented the Save the VA Group at the meeting.

Senators Mike Johanns (R-NE), John Barrasso (R-WY) and Mike Enzi (R-WY) were also present.

Johnson, Thune, Noem and Daugaard released the following statements:

“Today’s meeting was a good opportunity for the Save the VA Group representatives to present their case directly to Secretary Shinseki,” said Johnson. “I commend the Save the VA Group for delivering a passionate, thoughtful presentation to Secretary Shinseki. I set up this meeting because I wanted to make sure the VA takes the Save the VA Group’s concerns and proposal into account when considering changes to the Black Hills Health Care System and I will continue to closely monitor this situation.”

“I am pleased that the delegation and representatives of Save the VA finally had the opportunity to sit down with Secretary Shinseki,” said Thune. “I’m confident that we relayed to the Secretary the importance of the Hot Springs facility to our veterans and the significant obstacles that closing this facility poses to providing these men and women with the highest quality health care. I look forward to hearing from the Secretary on this matter so that area residents can finally be provided with some certainty and reassurance that the VA will continue to meet the important health care needs of area veterans.”

"I really appreciated Secretary Shinseki's consideration – he gave us more time than he had originally committed. The 'Save the VA' committee from Hot Springs gave a strong, succinct presentation. I hope that Secretary Shinseki and the VA will consider our position and do what is best for our veterans and for South Dakota," said Governor Daugaard.

“This was a productive meeting. I am appreciative that Secretary Shinseki made the time to meet with us, and that members of the Save the VA Committee were able to travel to Washington D.C. for it,” said Rep. Noem. “I have been engaged with the community for over a year on this process, and was very impressed with its strong defense of its proposal today. The Secretary indicated that he had not made a decision but would like to make one sooner, rather than later. I am confident that today’s meeting, and the strong presentation made by the Save the VA

Committee, has made Secretary Shinseki abundantly aware of how critical the VA facility is to our veterans and the Hot Springs community. I look forward hearing the Secretary's thoughts on the committee's proposal and will continue to work with him and members of the Hot Springs community toward a resolution that is best for our veterans."

Noem also announced in an earlier statement that she is hosting a Town Hall Meeting in Rapid City on Friday, Feb. 1 at 2 p.m. and invites Hot Springs residents to attend to learn more about their meeting with Sec. Shinseki. The Town Hall will be held at 2 p.m. in the University Center located at 4300 Cheyenne Boulevard.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/delegation-save-the-va-committee-meet-with-secretary-shinseki-in/article_10ea3380-69a4-11e2-a936-001a4bcf887a.html

Delegation, Save The VA Committee meet with Sec. Shinseki

Posted: Jan 28, 2013 4:56 PM MST

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"I am pleased that the delegation and representatives of Save the VA finally had the opportunity to sit down with Secretary Shinseki," said Thune. "I'm confident that we relayed to the Secretary the importance of the Hot Springs facility to our veterans and the significant obstacles that closing this facility poses to providing these men and women with the highest quality health care. I look forward to hearing from the Secretary on this matter so that area residents can finally be provided with some certainty and reassurance that the VA will continue to meet the important health care needs of area veterans."

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<http://www.kotatv.com/story/20756285/delegation-save-the-va-committee-meet-with-sec-shinseki>

Representatives meet to discuss fate of VA medical center in Hot Springs

Monday, 28 January 2013 15:43

South Dakota's Congressional Delegation, Governor Dennis Daugaard and representatives of the Save the VA Group met with US Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki in Washington D.C. to discuss the fate of the VA medical center in Hot Springs.

Senator Tim Johnson said he set up Monday's meeting to make sure the VA takes the Save the VA Group's concerns and proposal into account when considering changes to the Black Hills Health Care System. Johnson says "today's meeting was a good opportunity for the Save the VA Group representatives to present their case directly to Secretary Shinseki." Representative Kristi Noem says she is "confident that the strong presentation made by the Save the VA Committee has made Secretary Shinseki aware of how critical the VA facility is to our veterans and the Hot Springs community." Noem says the Secretary indicated that he had not made a decision, but would like to make one sooner, rather than later.

Tessa Thomas

<http://www.blackhillsfox.com/2013/01/28/Representatives-meet-to-discuss-fate-of-VA-medical-center-in-Hot-Springs>

Meeting to save VA hospital went well, lawmakers say



January 29, 2013 5:30 am • [Kevin Woster Journal staff](#)

Members of a delegation from Hot Springs fighting the closure of most VA medical facilities there were encouraged Monday by a 90-minute meeting with top U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs officials in Washington, D.C.

The meeting in the office of Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., included Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., and Rep. Kristi Noem, R-S.D., Gov. Dennis Daugaard and VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and other top department officials.

Save the VA spokesman Rich Gross said Monday evening that critics of the VA proposal got a good hearing in front of Shinseki.

"We were encouraged by the fact that a meeting that was supposed to last 45 minutes stretched into an hour and a half," Gross said. "We were very encouraged by the attention Secretary Shinseki gave to our presentation."

The meeting began with a video from Bryan Brewer, president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, expressing opposition to the proposed closure of most VA medical facilities in Hot Springs, including a treatment center for post-traumatic stress disorder and other ailments.

Brewer, who couldn't attend the meeting because of injuries suffered in a car accident, also was concerned about whether tribal veterans would get service from the Indian Health Service and how the proposed changes would affect them, Gross said.

Gross was joined at the meeting by four other members of the Save the VA Committee — Pat Russell, Bob Nelson, Amanda Campbell and Don Ackerman. Each made a presentation to Shinseki, describing counter proposals aimed at saving money, keeping the VA facility open and developing a national demonstration project to partner with the VA, provide innovative PTSD treatment and job-training assistance for veterans.

"We're tired but very optimistic," Gross said. "The secretary indicated that he would need to take everything we gave him into consideration and promised there would be due deliberation, and that we would probably be talking further."

Johnson, Thune, Noem and Daugaard issued a joint news release saying they were pleased with the meeting.

"I set up this meeting because I wanted to make sure the VA takes the Save the VA group's concerns and proposals into account when considering changes to the Black Hills Health Care System," Johnson said.

Thune said he was confident the meeting conveyed to Shinseki "the significant obstacles that closing this facility poses to providing these men and women with the highest-quality health care."

Noem said Shinseki had "indicated he had not made a decision but would like to make one sooner rather than later." Noem said she believed the presentation had an impact on Shinseki.

Daugaard said he was pleased that Shinseki "gave us more time than he had originally committed" and praised the Save the VA Committee members for their "strong, succinct presentation."

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/meeting-to-save-va-hospital-went-well-lawmakers-say/article_c69c8704-6527-530e-9d0e-1a8a8937d45f.html

Gov. Daugaard tours VA, meets with Save the VA group



January 29, 2013 3:32 am • [By Curt Nettinga](#)

Preps for D.C. meeting with local group

HOT SPRINGS – Governor Dennis Daugaard and staff members were in Hot Springs early last Thursday morning, to tour the Domiciliary at the VA Black Hills Health Care System. The Governor was touring the facility in preparation for the Jan. 28 meeting with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki in Washington, D.C.

“I am impressed by the facility there, and think it would be unfortunate if the federal government closes it and essentially mothballs it. It is a beautiful building, lots of potential for continued use to serve veterans,” Daugaard said on Friday morning via telephone from his office in Pierre.

Daugaard will be joining representatives of the Save the VA Campaign, including Pat Russell, Bob Nelson, Don Ackerman, Amanda Campbell and Rich Gross to discuss the future of the VA facilities in Hot Springs. In addition, the state’s congressional delegation, including Senators Tim Johnson and John Thune of South Dakota, Senator Mike Johanns of Nebraska, as well as Representative Kristi Noem will be on hand.

The meeting will be an opportunity for the Save the VA Group to present their proposal for the Hot Springs VA directly to Secretary Shinseki and share with him their concerns with the VA’s current proposal. The Veterans Administration has proposed to significantly downsize its presence in Hot Springs. The delegation opposes this proposal and will be seeking to have the Secretary make changes to accommodate the concerns of the Save the VA Group.

Daugaard was led on the tour by BHHCS director Steve DiStasio, staff member Deb Dodson and medical Chief of Staff Andrea Conti. District 30 State Senator Bruce Rampelberg, S.D. Dept. of Veterans Affairs Sec. Larry Zimmerman and Eric Matt from the governor’s office also participated.

Representatives from the Save the VA group were not invited to accompany the contingent on the tour, which Gov. Daugaard said did surprise him somewhat.

“This was actually my second time at the VA,” Daugaard said. “(wife) Linda and I were in Hot Springs once before and decided to be tourists and go look at the buildings, which are very beautiful. This was much more instructive, as we had guides to answer questions and such.”

Daugaard said that he was familiar with both proposals and has formed an opinion on how he is leaning.

“Obviously I would much prefer that the facility be maintained and that care would be provided as it is,” he said. “At a national level, I understand that we are a tiny piece of a very large puzzle, and they are trying to maintain their viability with the dollars they have and are trying to save money.

“I don’t know that this proposal does that.”

Daugaard said that he feels the costs of closing the existing facility and rebuilding new, combined with operational costs for other facilities and the fact that that as a federal asset the VA has to continue to maintain these buildings with their historic landmark status leads him to believe that won’t be a savings.

“I’m not sure that they can make that case. At it’s root, that is our best case to make to the VA, to say ‘Let’s take a new look at these dollars because we believe there may be some areas where the numbers don’t make sense and where a new look is appropriate.’ We want to end up with a request to allow us to work with Sec. Shinseki’s staff to find a different approach than closing the entire campus.”

Daugaard said that he had also heard the Save the VA’s planned presentation, and was hopeful that he was able to provide some constructive ideas to the group.

“Things along the lines of what worked, what to emphasize, maybe downplay something that doesn’t seem to be as persuasive. I think they have a good proposal to place before the Secretary for the continuation of care for our veterans in Hot Springs.”

Daugaard added that he sees an increased need for PTSD and Chemical Dependency services, such as are highlighted in the Save the VA proposal. “There are also a great number of Native American veterans in western South Dakota, on the Pine Ridge Reservation, who rely on services at the Hot Springs VA because Indian Health Services has been poorly staffed and offers inadequate care.

“We need to keep the promise we made to all of those veterans who need Hot Springs.”

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/gov-daugaard-tours-va-meets-with-save-the-va-group/article_2fa55a16-6972-11e2-ac8d-001a4bcf887a.html