

Legislature encourages feds to keep Hot Springs VA open

By Elizabeth “Sam” Grosz - Community News Service | Posted: Thursday, March 1, 2012 1:38 pm

The House and Senate of the South Dakota Legislature joined together recently in asking the federal government to consider keeping the Veterans Administration facility in Hot Springs open.

The resolution finalized Feb. 28 was in response to the proposal by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to close the VA Hospital, and revamp the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

“The proposed changes would result in the closure of the Hot Springs VA Domiciliary and inpatient hospital and nursing home services,” said the resolution, “with services to be moved to Rapid City and Fort Meade in Sturgis or served on a contractual basis by other private facilities in the area, leaving Hot Springs with only a VA outpatient clinic.”

The closure is expected to have an adverse impact on the community of Hot Springs and the surrounding area.

It is estimated, according to the resolution, that the current 1,062 employees will be reduced to 325 over the next eight years, negatively impacting the city’s employment and housing market, as well as its overall economy.

Sen. Jim Bradford, D-Pine Ridge, noted during the Senate consideration Feb. 28 that the medical care from the VA at Hot Springs is especially important to Native American veterans, as well as to the economy of Hot Springs.

http://chamberlainsun.com/news/article_2199e02e-63d6-11e1-8827-001a4bcf6878.html

Hot Springs V.A. March and Horse ride great day of Unity



HOT SPRINGS, SD - In a huge turnout, many veterans and supporters came out to show their support of the Veteran's Administration (VA) health care system here. There were close to 1000 marchers along with 100 riders who flooded the streets on February 25. It may have been the largest gathering in the history of Hot Springs where two cultures of warriors stood shoulder to shoulder to stop the VA from moving health care services out of Hot Springs. The Lakota veterans and supporters from the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Standing Rock reservation stood in unity with the warrior veterans from Hot Springs.

Horse riders from surrounding communities joined together along with team and wagons. There were also veteran color guards, motorcycle and ATV riders, antique vehicles and heavy equipment operators joining the procession to the VA. It was a great turn out to show support of keeping the VA in Hot Springs where it has been for nearly a century. The event was a demonstration to save the facility from the government chopping block after the VA announced proposed changes nearly a month ago.



Bryan Brewer, Chairman of the Oglala Lakota Veterans committee, and fellow Vietnam veteran Don Ackerman of Hot Springs, were joined by other veterans to coordinate the event. Don Ackerman was the fired up veteran who asked the Lakota to gather after the announcement of the

proposed changes by the VA. There was also a community effort to organize the event. The importance of the VA was clearly well supported in the Hot Springs march and ride. Temperatures in the 40's made it a great day for the outdoor protest. Some walked, some rode but it was all for one purpose, to "Save the VA."

It was a great day of Hot Springs hospitality as in the early part of the morning everyone met at the Legion post to be registered and a number was given to each person to record a large number of supports. There were close to 600 who registered. Others joined the march as it moved through town.



There was also a good breakfast available most of the morning. Lunch was also provided with hot homemade chili on the menu and it was good stuff. All marchers and horse riders were well fed.

"We don't want any one hungry that was going to be marching," said Don Ackerman. All the food was amazing and meeting our veterans from the surrounding communities was also an honor.

Vietnam veterans were in attendance along with the younger generation of Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi freedom veterans. The Vietnam veterans were in fact leading the way in the effort to stop the government's plan to close down the VA and certain services provided by the Hot Springs VA. It was the older Vietnam veterans who were the spear tip starting point for creating the movement to keep their VA hospital open. The Vietnam veterans were treated negatively upon their return from the battle field years ago and now here they are today taking care and looking out for another generation of veterans. Many Vietnam veterans expressed concern about soldiers who would soon be returning from Iraqi battle fields seeking local health care.



Inside the legion Veteran Duane Brewer spoke over a microphone. “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another,” he said.

Residents lined the streets some with signs saying “Save the VA” all the way up 5th street toward the actual hospital. The residents and home owners came outside to welcome those who were marching and riding.

Lakota rider John Wilson said “They can’t close this down; we are up here three times a week.” He used to accompany his late father, George Wilson, to the Hot Springs VA. John is also a veteran and his oldest son is now in the military. The VA hospital is a much needed facility in Hot Springs.

It was a complete show of support from the veteran friendly town of Hot Springs. In the friendliest atmospheres there was no different race everyone joined together for the veterans. People were treated as welcomed guests and the unity demonstrated that day was stronger than ever as the parade got underway and headed up 5th.

Also, it was a heartfelt sight as some were disabled veterans who could barely walk joined in the march. Some disabled Veterans rode in the back of flatbed trailers. Some were carried on ATV’s or carried on buck board wagons drawn by horse. Upon reaching the National Cemetery a ceremony was held.

After that the crowd proceeded to the front building for special guest speakers and spiritual leader prayer. Guest speakers were Adolph Bull Bear, Joe Brown Thunder, Chief Oliver Red Cloud, OST 5TH Member Myron Poirier and Ruth Brown of the Eagle Nest District on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Vietnam Veteran War Paint ceremony

An event this big had a great effort by organizers to bring it all together for one big showing. The Legion cooks were inside cooking up a storm all morning, outside in front a mini pow-wow was going on with early morning dancing compliments of the Creekside drum group.

Before starting out, all the riders were smudged with sage. Vietnam veteran Duane Brewer and Korean war veteran Basil Brave Heart walked amongst the riders and put war paint on each rider. This act was one rarely done off the ancient battle field with two elder vets applying war paint to the younger riders.

It was neat to see everyone wearing paint. It was a moment when the hearts of everyone beat a bit stronger as they witnessed the two battle field veterans painting each rider. It took a little while for it to sink in then it could be seen as the two vets were about half way around the circle of riders. They were putting their heart into saving the VA hospital right there amongst the riders.

Since returning from their military service, that VA hospital had helped them hold their war torn lives together. It was truly rare even for the Lakota to have their faces painted by veterans from two different eras, both Vietnam and a Korea.

Eagle Bone Whistle signal

It was neat when all of a sudden the signal rang out within those beautiful Black Hills surrounding the Hot Springs community. Wade Broken Nose blew his whistle as a big bald eagle floated overhead and it was the signal for riders to mount up. Then he blew the eagle bone whistle again for the riders to begin circling.

“It was like the vets gave us our own mission to gather the horse nation,” said one rider.

Our Vietnam veteran Duane Brewer had a tough time getting on his war horse. It was hard on his knees in the war zone trenches and since Vietnam, he seen a life time of VA hospital visits. Duane Brewer, an uncle and grandpa, wanted to ride and no matter what he wasn't about to miss out on this ride. After a couple attempts and every painful sound he was up in the saddle on a horse called War Bonnet. A grandfather is never without his grandchildren and Duane Brewer waited as his granddaughter was lifted on the back of the horse with him. After some good humor joking all was well with our veteran rider.

Many more vets joined in along the route. There were a lot of people who came to support our vets. There was a mix of riders also. Such as, the Slim Buttes Riders, the 4J Wilson Riders, Vern Roubideaux, Hank Brings Him Back and the Ropers, Charlie Standing Bear and Jacob and Kierra. Hot Springs cowboys were also part of the great day as Valden Morgan was driving a wagon with special trained horse hitched up his is an old buck skinner from way back. The South Dakota Driver club was also there with a Laura and her crew and a couple of wagons.

Ted Big Crow was another Veteran who had grandchildren on the ride. It was a great day of unity amongst our friendly neighbors of the Hot Springs area.

Unity found in the warm water town of Hot Springs

The soldiers of battlefields unknown were the reason for the gathering at Hot Springs. If not for them we may not have the choices we do in a world where waters can be so cold. Our veterans are the fire and desire where and when darkness tries to invade the freedom we hold and sometimes take for granted. We owe it to our veterans and if they want their VA in Hot Springs where it has been for close to a century then so be it.

They earned that choice and it is only asking for something that was already given to them. All the people who came together for our veterans in the march and ride should say enough to those who want to take away a soldiers' healing center in a sacred place where the Great Spirit allowed the purified warm waters to cleanse the wounded warriors who came forth and gave us the freedom we have today. They are only asking the great Father to help them "Save the VA hospital."

http://www.lakotacountrytimes.com/news/2012-02-29/Sports/Hot_Springs_VA_March_and_Horse_ride_great_day_of_U.html

Supporters of Hot Springs VA request deadline extension

March 02, 2012 7:30 am • [Curt Nettinga Hot Springs Star](#)

HOT SPRINGS -- For the second time in two months, South Dakota's congressional delegation has sent a letter to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki about proposed changes to the Hot Springs VA.

The letter, dated Feb. 29 and signed by Sen. Tim Johnson, Sen. John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem, reminds Shinseki that questions forwarded in a previous letter, dated Jan. 4, remain unanswered and that the delegation is "anxiously awaiting your reply. ..."

"We have yet to receive an answer to our request to extend the comment period beyond Feb. 29," the letter reads. "We understand that the VA is considering announcing an extension to March 31. We write today to request that you reconsider this deadline."

The delegation notes that although some Freedom of Information Act requests by the Save the VA community group have begun to be answered, about half are still outstanding and might not be answered until mid-March.

"Answers to the FOIA requests and to our questions are necessary for the community to offer thoughtful, educated feedback and counterproposals. Therefore, we request that you offer an extension of no less than 30 days after the final FOIA request has been answered and all answers to the questions raised in our letter are received."

The Save the VA campaign's executive committee issued a news release late Wednesday afternoon, echoing many of the items noted in the legislators' letter.

"Despite the delay in receiving answers to the Freedom of Information requests, the workgroups continue to make progress in crafting comments and counterproposals to the Veteran Administration's proposals," the news release said. "We appreciate the VA's willingness to respond to our requests, and we trust that they will be amenable to an extension for our responses. Our workgroups want to have accurate data to support our comments and counterproposals. Our responses, to a certain degree, rely on the release of accurate data."

The news release also expressed appreciation for the efforts of the congressional delegation.

Despite the proposed changes, Save the VA members remain hopeful.

"Things are coming together," veteran and retired VA employee Bob Nelson said, adding that VA Black Hills Health Care System Administrator Steve DiStasio "has got to be wondering what he started."

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/supporters-of-hot-springs-va-request-deadline-extension/article_ee6696e8-641b-11e1-910e-001871e3ce6c.html

VA extends deadline for feedback to VA proposal

March 05, 2012 8:49 am

HOT SPRINGS - Veterans, community members and leaders have answered the call to provide feedback to the proposals for the improvement of Veteran's health care services in portions of South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming.

In response to requests for additional time to provide feedback regarding the proposals, the Department of Veterans Affairs has extended the period for input to April 30, 2012. After that date, VA Black Hills will submit gathered comments, recommendations and counter-proposals to VA Central Office for review. VA Black Hills will continue to welcome and consider input received after April 30.

Steve DiStasio, Director, VA Black Hills commented, "We are very pleased with the interest and feedback received from Veterans and community members in response to the proposals."

For further information regarding the proposals, please visit: www.blackhills.va.gov/VABlackHillsFuture/ .

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/va-extends-deadline-for-feedback-to-va-proposal/article_fa56a120-66da-11e1-8e75-0019bb2963f4.html

Honoring a veteran relative



March 06, 2012 8:33 am • [By Curt Nettinga](#)

HOT SPRINGS - It was a solemn family reunion of sorts, during the Welcome Home Veterans ride on Feb. 25, when a special wreath was placed at the grave marker of William 'Bill' Geary.

Brothers Fred and Ed Thompson, with their cousin Bryan Brewer placed the red-flower wreath - with blue ribbon reading 'Uncle Bill,' at Geary's final resting place.

Amid the Welcome Home ride, the large number of participants took a side trip to the National Cemetary on the grounds of the Hot Springs VA, to hold a brief memorial service. Following the service, the Geary descendants had a simple ceremony of their own.

Bill Geary spent a year with the "Wild Bill Cody" troop in Europe prior to his joining the Army in 1891 and becoming an Indian scout.

He moved to what was then the Battle Mountain Sanitarium - now the VA - when it was a home for soldiers, after losing his eyesight.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/honoring-a-veteran-relative/article_c9c80e42-66d8-11e1-8f77-0019bb2963f4.html

Opinion - Bob Nelson

March 06, 2012 3:30 am

To the Editor:

What have our legislators been doing to help the Hot Springs VA? Some people feel not much, I disagree.

Our legislative staff have been at most of the events Save The VA has organized, listening to what veterans and the public are saying about the “proposed” closing of the Hot Springs VA. It’s our questions that were reflected in their January 4 letter to the Secretary of the VA.

The VA has been asked a lot of questions under the Freedom of Information Act and we’re starting to get answers. Like it or not, federal law dictates the time frame those questions are answered in. Our congressional folks are governed by those same laws.

I see this campaign as a paint-by-number picture. It’s our responsibility to color each number on the painting. As we do that the picture will begin to emerge and that picture will show veteran care is best served by keeping the VA Hospital in Hot Springs. Save The VA credibility is growing because we’re doing things the right way for the right reasons, America’s veterans.

Emotions are high and I imagine most of us are still angry, I still am but that anger needs to be directed at the right person and that person isn’t our congressional representatives. Instead how about writing and thanking our legislators for their support. Better yet why not shake their hand and thank them personally. I will the next time I have the opportunity.

Bob Nelson

Hot Springs

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/opinion---bob-nelson/article_fb0d8372-66ee-11e1-8cd5-0019bb2963f4.html

Opinion - Lessons to be learned

March 06, 2012 3:30 am • [From City Hall by Mayor Don De Vries](#)

I was impressed with the turnout and support at the Veterans' Welcome Home ride to the VA on Saturday, February 25. The participation and involvement from so many people from the entire region reflects the appreciation for the care that is given at the Hot Springs VA facility. The number of people and horses in the parade was remarkable. The weather cooperated until late afternoon, and the overall support for the veterans was impressive.

As I stood and listened to the speeches given at the VA, I was proud to be a part of showing our support for veterans care. I was also happy to hear the appreciation for the long history of professional care of veterans at this facility, and for the current staff of our Hot Springs VA. The messages we heard honoring our veterans, and supporting the VA care were refreshing. A big part of the history of Hot Springs is directly related to veterans' care, to include the VA center. The area has benefited from the VA being located in Hot Springs, and the veterans treated at the facility have benefited from our caring community.

Recently I have heard several times, in different venues that this issue has driven the entire area to work together toward a common goal. I believe this issue could change the attitude and direction of our community. Working together for one common goal is what makes a community strong.

We must continue to work together in the future, as we change and grow the Hot Springs area. It is up to us to consider different options, and determine our own future. It should not be unmanageable, when we all work together. Change is inevitable; let's work together to make the change positive.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/opinion---lessons-to-be-learned/article_6f59ba88-66f0-11e1-bf6a-0019bb2963f4.html

Opinion - Welcome Ride a positive indicator

March 06, 2012 3:30 am • [Guest editorial By Pat Russell](#)

The Veterans Welcome Home ride on February 25 was a resounding success. It was a remarkable, one-of-a-kind day for Hot Springs. There were participants from all the South Dakota Native American reservations, Iowa, Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, North Dakota and all parts of South Dakota. Many community members rode or marched. The cooperation of the City of Hot Springs, with local law enforcement, helped all our visitors to feel welcome. We are thankful that VA authorities allowed access to the campus. J. David Cox, National Secretary Treasurer of the American Federation of Government Employ-ees, was delighted with our grass roots efforts and is helping to carry our message nationwide.

This logistically complicated event came together on short notice. It required considerable work from a lot of folks who are passionate about supporting the Hot Springs VA. It was truly gratifying to see it all come together. We surely appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to meet our fellow veterans and citizens from the reservations and neighboring states. I was particularly moved by the ceremonies that the Native American leaders and veterans shared with us.

It's important for me to point out that our South Dakota Congressional delegation all had staff representatives join us for the event. The campaign greatly appreciates the continued support of Senator Johnson, Senator Thune and Representative Noem for our efforts.

Photos and video of the events have been put online at Facebook, Youtube, www.theveterantown.com, and www.fundtheva.com. We continue to be contacted by concerned veterans and organizations outside our immediate area who have heard our message.

The Ride is a clear indicator that veterans are very troubled about the downsizing proposed for the Hot Springs VA. We affirm our commitment to continue the fight to preserve the benefits that our veterans have earned.

We thank everyone who came out to join us, and who helped to bring about this amazing convergence of so many people.

Patrick Russell is President of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1539 and is a member of the Save the VA Campaign's Executive Committee.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/opinion---welcome-ride-a-positive-indicator/article_be596e22-66ef-11e1-bad6-0019bb2963f4.html

Save the VA Campaign pleased with deadline extension

March 07, 2012 11:24 am

HOT SPRINGS – A spokesman for the Save the VA Campaign said they were pleased with the Department of Veterans Affairs announcement earlier this week to extend the deadline to April 30 for feedback regarding the proposed closure of the Hot Springs VA, which was first announced to the public on Dec. 12, 2011.

“We are gratified and encouraged by the overwhelming support the Save the VA campaign has received from veterans, the Hot Springs community, the Native American community, and by many other supporters throughout South Dakota and the surrounding states,” said Rich Gross, a member of the Save the VA Campaign Executive Committee.

“The Black Hills Health Care System of the VA had well over two years to develop their initial proposal. We’ve had only a little over two months so far to gather input, data, and suggestions from the public,” said Gross. “In fact, although we are receiving responses to our Freedom of Information requests, all of the data and material requested has not yet been received.”

“A quality proposal in response to possible action by the Black Hills Health Care System requires stakeholder input, quality data, and a well reasoned response,” Gross added. “This extension provides us with the time necessary to accomplish those ends.”

The VA Black Hills Health Care System’s decision to extend the deadline came on the heels of a recent letter sent by South Dakota’s U.S. Congressional leaders – Senators Tim Johnson and John Thune, and Representative Kristi Noem – to VA Secretary Eric Shinsecki that criticized his department’s lack of response to their previous questions regarding the VA’s proposal and their delays in responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

“We appreciate the support we’ve received from our Congressional delegation and from other public officials who have provided much needed advice and support,” Gross said.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/save-the-va-campaign-pleased-with-deadline-extension/article_fb803b20-6882-11e1-b8c6-0019bb2963f4.html

FORUM: VA should abandon plans to shut down Hot Springs VA

March 10, 2012 6:30 am • [J. David Cox National secretary-treasurer of the American Federation of Government employees and a registered nurse with the Department of Veterans Affairs for more than 20 years](#)

Our military men and women serve selflessly to ensure the security of our nation. And when they conclude their tour of duty, when they return home from war we've promised to provide them with the training they need to enter back into civilian life, medical care to treat their wounds and a support system that reflects our gratitude for their service. We honor that promise through the services we provide through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

But in Hot Springs, that promise is being broken. As a leader within the nation's largest federal employee union, I have a bird's-eye view of the actions taken by VA management officials nationwide that have undermined the mission of the agency to provide quality care to our nation's heroes.

The facility director has laid out a plan to close down the vital services at the Hot Springs Medical Center and parcel out care to community hospitals and other VA facilities up to 100 miles away. Under this plan, veterans will be forced to add hours to their commute time just to make an appointment, or be pushed to private sector health care centers that lack the VA's unique expertise to treat the wounds of war.

Unfortunately, the situation at the Hot Springs VA is one I've seen before. Services have been cut, staffing minimized and over time the case is made to close down the facility. This is a calculated approach by some at the agency to starve our VA hospitals of vital resources in order to do away with in-patient care at VA hospitals and essentially function as an insurance company.

This is not the mission of the VA. This is no way to care for our veterans, and the community of Hot Springs recognizes this injustice and is fighting back.

The Hot Springs community has worked tirelessly for months to save its VA and keep providing the health care services veterans have depended on for more than 100 years. The community effort is remarkable, and I am extremely proud that our AFGE Local 1539 is an integral part of this effort to do what's best for our nation's vets. People from all walks of life have come together to beat back the proposal to close this facility with a renewed passion that should be recognized across this country.

They are organized, educated and passionate and are posed to this save this VA from closure. They are veterans and their families, VA employees, community members and shop owners. They are the "Veterans Town."

The Hot Springs community knows what's at stake for the veterans and its community if this facility closes. They know what it means to provide world-class care to America's veterans. It is time for the Department of Veterans Affairs to take notice to the needs of the community, invest in the rebuilding of services at the Hot Springs VA and abandon any plans to close it down.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/opinion/forum-va-should-abandon-plans-to-shut-down-hot-springs/article_36938e6c-6a34-11e1-a414-001871e3ce6c.html

Save the VA Campaign receives Golden donation



March 12, 2012 10:25 am

WALL - In response to challenges facing the community of Hot Springs directly related to the proposed closing or moving of the VA Medical Center and other services, Golden West Telecommunications made a \$5,000 donation last Friday at the Golden West offices in Hot Springs.

Making the presentation were Golden West board members Ken Tonsager and Harold Wyatt of Hot Springs. Craig Romey, chairman of the Save the VA Campaign's fundraising committee and committee member Wes Grimes accepted the donation on behalf of the Save the VA Campaign.

According to Golden West general manager Denny Law, the donation reflects the company's understanding of how critical the VA hospital is to the health of veterans and the economic future of Hot Springs.

"It is absolutely vital to all that we can to ensure that veterans continue to receive the care they deserve and that Hot Springs continues to be the community that delivers that care. We are pleased to join the effort to help save the VA," Law said.

"We appreciate the donation from Golden West," said Romey. "It couldn't have come at a better time and shows that Golden West is committed to Hot Springs in both the services they provide and the jobs they create. This donation is just another example of their ongoing commitment to our great community."

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/save-the-va-campaign-receives-golden-donation/article_3a07ac76-6c60-11e1-90c6-0019bb2963f4.html

Johnson questions VA secretary on BH proposal

Sen. Johnson questions VA secretary on BH proposal

Posted: Mar 15, 2012 3:26 PM MDT

Washington, DC – In an exchange with U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD) during a hearing Thursday morning, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki pledged to take a hard look at the local community's forthcoming proposal in reaction to the VA's initial plan for changes to the Black Hills Health Care System. Johnson, who chaired a Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee hearing, expressed his concerns about the VA's proposal, which was announced in December.

"I'm grateful that Secretary Shinseki has said he will take a good look at the local community's counter-proposal for changes to the Black Hills Health Care System. This proposal should receive all due consideration," said Chairman Johnson.

Secretary Shinseki told Johnson that the VA has held 14 community briefings since the proposal was released and is willing to hold more in the months ahead.

Senators Johnson, John Thune (R-SD) and Representative Kristi Noem (R-SD) recently joined together in getting the VA to extend the comment period for stakeholders to offer feedback and counter-proposals. Chairman Johnson pushed today to ensure that the proposal from the Save the VA Committee is given the consideration it deserves.

Johnson also pushed the VA to complete a cost-benefit analysis for their Black Hills proposal. Recently, the South Dakota Congressional delegation asked the VA if a cost comparison between new construction and a full renovation of the existing domiciliary building had been completed.

Dr. Robert Petzel, Under Secretary for Health at the Department of Veterans Affairs, told Johnson that a cost comparison is underway and that the VA would not proceed with the proposal until the analysis is completed.

"I'm glad I could get members of the Black Hills community the assurances they deserve regarding the Save the VA Committee's counter-proposal. Any changes to the Black Hills Health Care System would have a far-reaching effect on the entire community. There should be a strong dialogue between the VA and local community as this process continues," said Johnson.

<http://www.kotatv.com/story/17169783/sen-johnson-questions-va-secretary-on-bh-proposal>

Sign online petition at Change.org

March 19, 2012 9:24 am

HOT SPRINGS – An easy way to show your support of the Hot Springs VA is to sign an online petition recently created by Save the VA Public Relations Committee member Justin Gausman.

One way to sign the petition is to simply log on to www.Change.org and enter “Hot Springs VA” into the “Find” space found in the top browser bar. Another quicker way to find the link is to go to www.chn.ge/zpuT7J which will link you directly to the petition.

Anyone with internet access is able to sign the petition.

Concerned about privacy or security issues? Gausman says not to worry.

“Change.org is a reputable website that has a very thorough privacy policy,” he said. Furthermore, if you receive further emails regarding other petitions at Change.org, you can simply unsubscribe from them.

Gausman said the addition of this new online petition for the “Save the VA Campaign” allows the local effort to reach a national audience.

“Change.org has been used to get major corporations to drop a proposed \$5 service charge for using debit cards, to get Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to change her position to oppose Saudi Arabian laws that restrict women from driving, to petition the MPAA to change the rating of a revealing documentary about bullying in today’s schools from an R rating to PG-13, as well as other important social & political causes,” he said.

“Americans, especially veterans, live everywhere - from those within our borders to those abroad including active duty military and international tourists. This allows for word to spread. If we want our campaign to spread nationally, we need to make it relevant to people nationally.”

Gausman added that this petition will be submitted to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the House & Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs, and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki on or shortly thereafter the goal date of Independence Day, 2012.

“They’re not just names on a website,” Gausman said. “Every signature has as much weight as a statement on a written petition.”

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/sign-online-petition-at-change-org/article_dbc1c278-71d7-11e1-8eed-0019bb2963f4.html

Opinion - Dusty Pence

March 20, 2012 3:30 am

To the Editor:

I have on my desk a 41-page response to a FOIA request for information regarding the proposed closure/relocation of Hot Springs VA services. This includes the mostly superficial “thorough review of the services provided in this region.”

I did learn a few things:

The VA has no notes, reports, analysis or supporting documents that indicate the cost of their proposed plans to operate the Black Hills VA System.

The VA estimates cost to maintain unused buildings at \$5.33/square foot, or \$2.4 million if they vacate the Hot Springs campus.

The only documentation the VA offers to demonstrate the impact of their plan on veterans is the two-page memo dated 2-6-12, which outlined conclusions but provided no supporting data.

I learned that the VA planned to “Continue to fund interior design at extraordinary levels to improve the furnishings, flooring, window treatments, and ambience of the facility.”

I learned that over a year ago they placed as a future goal moving the Domiciliary to Rapid City, consolidating and/or closing several Hot Springs services, and pursuing local/federal sharing agreements.

And that the process included: “Congressional Representatives—discussion of options, other ideas, develop support.”

I also learned that in the 14 months since VA officials documented these plans, they apparently have not had a single meeting nor collected any data to estimate costs (in dollars and human impact) of maintaining the existing structure versus building new.

Yet, they have somehow managed to conclude that new is better.

It may be. I just want proof.

Dusty Pence

Hot Springs

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/opinion---dusty-pence/article_fc5b85fc-71da-11e1-935e-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz1q33gkqlQ