

OURS

EDITORIAL: What are VA's priorities?

November 09, 2012 7:30 am • [Journal editorial board](#)

Since the Department of Veterans Affairs announced its plan to close most of its facilities in Hot Springs, getting the VA to discuss its plans and consider alternatives has become increasingly difficult.

Black Hills VA Health Care System officials said they would consider alternative proposals to their announced plan, but in a Sept. 10 meeting with Hot Springs' Save the VA group, VA officials said they could not negotiate on its plan.

South Dakota's congressional delegation wrote to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki expressing their disappointment with a breakdown in discussions between the VA and the Hot Springs community and requested a meeting with Shinseki in Hot Springs. The letter was signed by South Dakota Sens. Tim Johnson and John Thune and Rep. Kristi Noem, Wyoming Sens. Mike Enzi and John Barrasso and Rep. Cynthia Lummis, and Nebraska Sen. Mike Hohanns and Rep. Adrian Smith.

After receiving no response from Shinseki, Sens. Johnson and Thune and Rep. Noem wrote another letter on Oct. 24 to Shinseki formally opposing the VA's restructuring plan and again asking to meet with the VA secretary in Hot Springs.

Throughout this process, the VA has been uncooperative in discussing its proposal. The VA provided little documentation for its reorganization plan when it was announced, and it was only because of public pressure and the intervention of our congressional delegation that the VA did an economic analysis of its proposal. Of course, the VA's analysis supports its own plan.

Now it won't discuss an alternative plan from Save the VA to create a post-traumatic stress disorder treatment center in Hot Springs, expand outpatient clinic services at existing VA facilities, and provide education and job training for veterans, even though it promised that it would seriously examine other ideas for using its facilities.

The more the VA digs in on its reorganization plan, the more the idea sets in that the VA has never cared what Hot Springs and South Dakota thinks about its proposal.

Early on we called on our congressional delegation to become involved, and Johnson, Thune and Noem have ably joined the fight. By ignoring requests for meetings and cutting off discussions, the VA keeps raising the stakes.

Is the VA truly interested in improving health care for veterans or spending taxpayer money on itself to build newer facilities? It's hard to tell what the VA's priorities are.

Today's topic

THE ISSUE: South Dakota congressional delegation opposes Black Hills VA Health Care System's reorganization plan.

OUR VIEW: VA's behavior since announcing plans for Hot Springs casts doubt on what its priorities are.

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/opinion/editorial-what-are-va-s-priorities/article_7593f1c9-e66d-5453-b3db-92bb50927b4d.html

OPINION - Kristi Noem

November 12, 2012 11:45 pm

To the Editor:

“Thank you Hot Springs”

I recently had the opportunity to host a “Conversation with Kristi” event at the Fall River GOP office in Hot Springs. It was wonderful to visit with old and new friends about what I’ve been up to on the campaign trail and to answer any questions.

It was great to a frank and honest conversation about the issues facing our nation – in particular, our fight to save the Hot Springs VA hospital. I believe our government has an obligation to support our veterans’ and to honor the sacrifice that so many have made for our freedom and for the security of our nation. I am committed to ensuring that the voice of the Hot Springs community is heard in Washington. We need to get more support from other lawmakers in Washington because this truly is a national issue. We also need to be working with committee leadership to ensure that we raise more awareness and give this issue the attention it deserves.

There is nothing more productive than conversations like the ones I had in Hot Springs, and I would like to thank those who shared their thoughts and comments with me. I am honored to represent Hot Springs, Fall River County and the people of South Dakota in Congress.

Kristi Noem

Castlewood

http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/hot-springs/opinion---kristi-noem/article_8a9d4dd6-2cf8-11e2-b3b3-0019bb2963f4.html