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COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE,
OCEANS AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-3003

August 9, 2011

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

As you know, access to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) health facilities is of crucial importance for our nation's veterans. But many are forced to travel long distances to reach the closest facility, whether it is a VA medical center or a community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC).

This problem is especially acute in my Congressional district, and throughout southern New Jersey. A veteran in Tuckerton, New Jersey who wants to visit the nearest VA medical center in Philadelphia must travel an hour and a half through dense traffic. South Jersey veterans seeking care at Ft. Dix CBOC, which is small and cannot offer many needed treatments, face difficulties in gaining entrance because of the required security of the military base.

These challenges could be avoided, and veterans could receive improved care, through providing access to a local VA medical center or through providing a free-standing CBOC with expanded services. I also believe these issues would be addressed by an effort I have collaborated on with Congressman Frank LoBiondo and the other Members of Congress from South Jersey, the *Veterans Efficiencies through Savings Act* (VETS Act), which would direct the VA to examine the distances of community-based clinics, such as those in South Jersey, to VA medical centers and conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Such an analysis would give VA a basis on which to determine how south Jersey veterans could be better served, and how VA services in the area could be more efficient.

I would also like to request the Department of Veterans Affairs analysis produced through the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process of the gaps in care and access issues in New Jersey's Third Congressional District, including Burlington County, Ocean County, and Camden County. At the April 5, 2011 hearing of the Committee on Veterans Affairs' Subcommittee on Health on "Deconstructing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Construction Planning," Deputy Secretary W. Scott Gould testified that the SCIP process "quantifies and prioritizes the need to repair, upgrade, dispose of, or replace VA's aging infrastructure and address the current and future needs of America's veterans within the context of prudent capital investment decision making." In an answer provided for the record on April 26th, it was indicated that the SCIP submission for the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical

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center proposed expanding the CBOC at Ft. Dix-McGuire-Lakehurst in 2013 by “(possibly) moving off Joint Base Dix-McGuire-Lakehurst and into the community.” It was also indicated that a final decision on the project would be made by the end of Fiscal Year 2011. I would like documentation of this analysis, as well as a personal update on the status of the project.

I would also like to reiterate my previous invitation to you to come and visit the Third District so that you might observe some of these problems first-hand and have an opportunity to interact with our local veterans.

As a Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I look forward to continuing to work together on behalf of the veterans of New Jersey’s Third District, and all our nation’s veterans. I appreciate your time and consideration of this important matter, and thank you for your dedicated service to our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Runyan', with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the signature.

Jon Runyan
Member of Congress