

August 5, 2003

Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Principi:

My staff appreciated the opportunity to be briefed on the details of the National Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Draft Plan, which was transmitted to the CARES Commission yesterday. I am writing you in regard to VA's strategy to specify priorities for and pursue the estimated \$5 billion of investments that have thus far been identified in Phase II of this process.

Mr. Secretary, I believe that VA has made a concerted effort to better match VA's physical health care infrastructure to the population it serves. Integral to the process of consolidating and streamlining VA's resources for more efficient care delivery, however, is the availability of modern, efficient health care facilities to receive the workload diverted from closed or converted facilities.

I understand that VA is revising its capital investment strategy to identify the most pressing CARES projects. I am eager to be advised of how this process will differ from VA's current capital investment strategy, any new criteria specific to the CARES process that will be considered and how such criteria will be weighted in relation to other factors.

As I have indicated in the past, I believe the timing of these investments is integral to the success of the restructuring process; for example, as in the case of the VA Chicago, I would be loathe to support the closure of a facility before the Administration has requested or identified a funding source for the replacement facility. I believe honoring our

Honorable Anthony Principi
August 5, 2003

commitments to veterans to make promised investments in their market areas is critical to the completion of CARES.

I would also like to be advised about VA's strategy for seeking the funds for the investments that are identified and an approximate timeline for seeking such funds through appropriations or other funding strategies. I believe it is crucial for the Administration and Congress to work together toward achieving the goals of a safer, more modern and efficient health care delivery system for our veterans. While I understand the CARES Commission is just now beginning its work and that your final approval will not be granted until December, I hope you will provide me with VA's strategy for identifying projects and requesting funds for these projects within the next 60 days.

Mr. Secretary, I know we share the goal of creating a better health care system for our Nation's veterans. I look forward to working with you on achieving this goal.

Sincerely,

LANE EVANS
Ranking Democratic Member