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January 22, 2009

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

Congratulations on your new position as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I look forward to working with you as you seek to serve veterans across the country and, specifically, in the Third Congressional District of Indiana. I am writing to request your immediate attention to the status of inpatient and outpatient care at the Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

As you may know, the VA's independent CARES Commission issued a report in 2004 recommending to then-VA Secretary Anthony Principi that he close inpatient care at our veterans hospital. Secretary Principi accepted the recommendation and the in-patient wing of our hospital was slated for closure. If this decision had been implemented, it would have required vets from throughout my district in northern Indiana to travel to Indianapolis for all their inpatient care.

Since then, I have been fighting in concert with the efforts of Hoosier veterans and on their behalf in Washington D.C. to overturn the Secretary's decision. Throughout this battle, we have experienced some small victories. First, my staff was able to determine that the CARES Commission had used incorrect data in making its recommendation. I raised this point with the VA Secretary, and he agreed to put the closure on hold and completely reexamine the VA's decision. In addition, the VA issued a directive establishing a new 25-bed threshold for smaller VA facilities, which is a much lower than the CARES Commission's 40-bed threshold.

Currently, my office is awaiting the results of a study conducted by consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton on the Fort Wayne VA hospital and outpatient care center. This study was scheduled to be coupled with a report Booz Allen completed in the summer of 2007. The combined document was to be presented to then-VA Secretary, Dr. James Peake. It was my hope that based on this combined report Secretary Peake would decide to keep inpatient care at the hospital Fort Wayne. Because a decision was not made on this report prior to the end of the former administration, I would like to receive an update on the status of this report as soon as possible.

In addition, I would like to meet with you in person to further discuss the specifics of our situation in Fort Wayne at your earliest convenience.

To send veterans—and their families—to an inpatient facility in Indianapolis, over a hundred miles from their homes, is totally unacceptable. I will continue to fight on behalf of the veterans in northern Indiana to protect inpatient care in Fort Wayne.

I look forward to working with you and your staff on achieving resolution to this issue in the coming months. I know you feel, as I do, that the brave men and women who have worn the uniform in defense of our nation and its freedoms deserve our deepest gratitude.

Sincerely,


Mark E. Souder
Member of Congress

*Thanks for your conversation.
I hope we can meet soon.*

www.souder.house.gov