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STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN LEE TERRY

2ND DISTRICT OF NEBRASKA

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

AUGUST 20, 2009

WHEN I WAS FIRST ELECTED TO CONGRESS, NEARLY 11 YEARS AGO

I TOURED THE OMAHA VA MEDICAL FACILITY. THE TOUR

WAS A QUICK LOOK AT THE BUILDING THAT CARES FOR OUR

VETERANS. AT THE SAME TIME MY CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE WAS

RECEIVING COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF CARE, THE RUN

DOWN NATURE OF THE FACILITY AND THE POOR ATTITUDE OF THE

EMPLOYEES.

IN 2003 AL WASHKO TOOK OVER AS NEW DIRECTOR FOR THE OMAHA VA

MEDICAL CENTER. FROM DAY ONE MR. WASHKO REALIZED THE VAST

PROBLEMS AT THE FACILITY. HE IDENTIFIED AND QUANTIFIED THE

PROBLEMS AND PUT THE VA ON A PATH TO INCREASED QUALITY OF

HEALTH CARE IMPROVED ATTITUDE OF THE EMPLOYEES. SINCE MR

WASHKO HAS BEEN IN CHARGE MY OFFICE HAS RECEIVED VERY LITTLE

COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE OMAHA VA.

I AM PROUD TO HELP WITH FUNDING TO MAKE MUCH NEEDED REPAIRS

TO THE FACILITY. SOME OF THOSE IMPROVEMENTS INCLUDE: NEW ICU,

NEW MRI, UPDATED SURGERY SUITES AND RENOVATED ER.

LATER I REQUESTED MONIES FOR THE MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IT WOULD

HAVE COST JUST TO UPGRADE THE HVAC SYSTEM. WHEN I TOURED

THE FACILITY IT BECAME VERY APPARENT THATWE WERE USING "DUCT

TAPE" TO TRY AND FIX MAJOR PROBLEMS.

WHEN I THEN MET WITH MR. WASHKO I WANTED HIS OPINION ON

WHETHER BUILDING A NEW VA HOSPITAL WAS NEEDED. HIS RESPONSE

WAS OVERWHELMINGLY YES!

IN JULY 2005 I WROTE A LETTER TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS ASKING FOR ASSISTANCE IN

INITIATING A FEASIBILITY STUDY TO IMPROVE THE VETERANS HEALTH

CARE IN OMAHA.

IN 2007 I MET WITH THEN SECRETARY JIM NICHOLSON ABOUT THE

CURRENT TROUBLING FACILITIES AT THE OMAHA VA. I PARTNERED

WITH MY NEBRASKA COLLEAGUE IN THE SENATE, BEN NELSON.

SENATOR NELSON SITS ON THE APPROPRIATIONS AND ARMED

SERVICES COMMITTEE SO IT WAS LOGICAL WE WOULD PARTNER ON

NELSON WILL BE THE LEAD. I HAVE REMAINED INTRICATELY INVOLVED

IN THE PROCESS.

LAST YEAR I AGAIN TOURED THE OMAHA VA WITH THEN SECRETARY

PEAKE. AND AGAIN THE PROBLEMS THAT WERE INDICATED YEARS

BEFORE WERE STILL THERE OR HAD GOTTEN WORSE.

IT IS CLEAR TO ME THAT THE OMAHA VA IS GREAT AT PROVIDING CARE

FOR OUR VETERANS. BUT THE FACILITY, BEING 59 YEARS OLD IS IN

GREAT NEED OF REPLACEMENT. THE ROOMS ARE TOO SMALL, THE

VENTILATION SYSTEM IS NOT UP TO CODE, THE HVAC SYSTEM NEEDS

IMMEDIATE REPAIR AND THE PIPING AND SEWER SYSTEM IS SO OLD

THAT REPAIRS JUST DON'T MAKE SENSE.

A NEW FACILITY IS CRITICAL TO THE FUTURE CARE OF THOSE WHO SO

PROUDLY SERVED OUR COUNTRY. I REALLY BELIEVE THE NATURE OF

THE BUILDING INHIBITS THE FURTHER GROWTH OF THAT EXACT SITE. I

DO WANT TO COMMEND THE UNMC AND CREIGHTON DOCTORS AND

STUDENTS WHO DO THEIR VERY BEST EVERY SINGLE DAY TO CARE

FOR OUR VETS. YOUR WORK DOES NOT GO UNNOTICED AND I

COMMEND YOU FOR IT.

THE VA AND CONGRESS MUST MAKE A CHOICE---A NEW BUILDING OR

PARTNER WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR. MOST VETERANS I SPEAK WITH

ARE IN FULL SUPPORT OF A NEW HOSPITAL. THERE IS HOWEVER SOME
RESISTANCE TO ELIMINATING THE HOSPITAL ALL TOGETHER. IF A
MERGER DOES OCCUR THE VA MUST RETAIN ITS IDENTITY.

BUILDING NEW OR COLLABORATING WITH AN EXISTING HOSPITAL HAS

THE BUY IN FROM VETERANS IN OMAHA, WE ALSO HAVE BUY IN

FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY--SOME HAVE OFFERED TO BUILD

THE NEW BUILDING AND LEASE IT BACK TO US. WE ALSO HAVE BUY IN

FROM OUR CONGRESSMAN STEVE KING IN IOWA. WE ALSO HAVE 100

PERCENT SUPPORT FROM CONGRESSMAN'S JEFF FORTENBERRY AND

ADRIAN SMITH. SO THE ENTIRE NEBRASKA DELEGATION SUPPORTS

THIS IMPORTANT ENDEAVOR.

I WANT WHAT IS BEST FOR OUR VETERANS, SO IF THAT MEANS A NEW

FACILITY OR IF IT MEANS COMBINING EFFORTS WITH AN EXISTING

HOSPITAL I AM ON BOARD. AND I WOULD EVEN LIKE TO SEE THE

OMAHA VA STRIVE TO BE ONE OF THE CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE.

THE MEN AND WOMEN SERVING OUR COUNTRY ARE MAKING

TREMENDOUS SACRIFICES TO PROTECT OUR COUNTRY. I WOULD LIKE

TO SAY THANK YOU TO ALL OUR VETERANS FOR THEIR SERVICE AND

SACRIFICE. IT IS TIME FOR US TO DO THE RIGHT THING FOR OUR

VETERANS, WE MUST HAVE A NEW FACILITY FOR HEALTHCARE IN

OMAHA, WE CAN'T WAIT, WE MUST DO IT NOW.

