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Washington, DC 20515-3214

February 13, 2004

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The Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Principi:

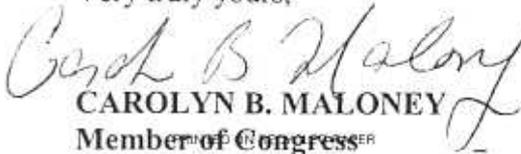
After reading the CARES Commission's report regarding the Manhattan veterans hospital, all I can say is – Why would the Veterans Administration waste taxpayers' money by moving forward with a "feasibility study" on the possibility of transferring inpatients to Brooklyn and outpatients to other facilities in the area?

The CARES Commission report points out major concerns arising from the possible closing of the Manhattan VA Hospital:

1. The Commission acknowledges that both the Brooklyn and Manhattan VA hospitals are currently at 80% of capacity. Populations of patients that large cannot be combined without either expanding one of the hospitals (at great cost) or leaving patients without adequate medical service.
2. The Commission acknowledges that patient populations are likely to grow, or at least not to decrease, through 2012. What the Commission failed to mention is that we simply do not know the impact of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan on future patient populations. We do know that the Manhattan VA Hospital is already treating some of the veterans who have recently returned from the conflict.
3. The Commission acknowledges that there would be serious transportation problems for veterans trying to reach the Brooklyn VA hospital. The Commission quoted Paul Wekenmann from Disabled American Veterans who indicated that veterans would end up taking two subways and two buses, resulting in a commute time of at least 1 ½ hours.
4. The Commission acknowledges that the Manhattan VA Hospital is a center of excellence in six areas and quoted Dean Glickman of NYU Medical Center who testified that these centers of excellence could not be replicated in Brooklyn without great cost to the Department and to the veterans who live in the community.

In short, given the facts set forth in the CARES Commission report, it makes absolutely no sense for the Veterans Administration to commission a study to consider moving patients to Brooklyn and outpatients to other facilities (which sounds to me like closure of the Manhattan VA Hospital). We already know that it would be a terrible idea for veterans. I respect your dedication to working for veterans of this country – but the best way to help veterans would be to study ways to improve this hospital, not to close it. I truly hope that you will exercise your discretion and reject the idea of further study.

Very truly yours,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

CBM/mre