

Commenter IA1: Mary Ann Ackerman

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mary Ann Ackerman President Unit 71

Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10 3.10.2.2

Need: As the American Legion Auxiliary we
serve both the Veterans and this community,
Many of our residents are Veterans who live
here because of the VA. If the VA closes
Hot Springs stands to lose a vital service
organization which has been here since 1920.
The majority of our members are married
to veterans. If our spouses are forced to
relocate because of the VA closure we
will lose our Auxiliary and all of the services
it provides.

We serve the State Veterans Home
in Hot Springs with monthly activities, shower
supplies, a hygiene room, clothing and
holiday parties. Our Chaplain visits the
veterans in the nursing home at the
State Home, as well as veterans residing
in the community nursing home the state

I Carol Harvey give permission/authorization for SaveTheVA to
enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Carol Harvey Date: 2-20-16
American Aux. 1st Vice President
1545 Albany Ave
Hot Springs, SD 57747

IA-1: VA appreciates your service to our Veterans in the Hot Springs community. It is our intent to play a continued role in the Hot Springs community and do all we can to keep it a Veterans town. VA notes that the new preferred alternative A-2 includes a continued presence on the VA campus through operation of a new CBOC in renovated Building 12. A VA national call center is also now proposed for Buildings 3 and 4 on campus. While not related to the proposed reconfiguration of healthcare services, it is an example of the types of adaptive reuses available for the Hot Springs VAMC under Alternative G.

VA also acknowledges this comment as support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC fully operational and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

IA-1

Commenter IA1: Mary Ann Ackerman

Veteran's Home will no longer have these services if our Auxiliary closes up due to the VA closure.

Mary Ann Ackerman Unit 71 President.

We also service Hot Springs youth. We give three scholarships annually to high school students and we send 5 girls from the junior class to Girls state which teaches them how government works

Commenter IA1: Mary Ann Ackerman

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mary Ann Ackerman

Address: [REDACTED] Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone:

e-mail: [REDACTED]

EIS Section: 3.10 3.10.2.2

EIS Statement: Socioeconomics and Veteran Population

Comment: Also, as Hot Springs is the Veteran's Town, many of our children are presently in the military.

Without organizations like ours here to welcome them home, help them transition back to civilian life, having no VA and no American Legion/Auxiliary will adversely affect these returning Veterans.

There will be no organization that, without them saying a word, the Veterans know they are understood.

We are the wives, the mothers, sisters and daughters of the Veterans of this town. We KNOW their plight. We KNOW they need a rural VA, and in this town, which served their father, grandfathers and the father beyond that.

For the Love of God and country, SAVE OUR VA.

Addendum to original statement

Commenter IA2: Joe Allen

Commenter IA2: Joe Allen

February 18, 2012

Eric Shinseki
Secretary Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20420-0001

RE: The Reason I Chose the Hot Springs VA

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I am a 100% disabled Vet, who was honorably discharged from the U.S.A.F. after 20 years of service (1947-1968).

In 2003, due to my failing health, my wife and I decided to move from Southern California to a rural area to escape the hubbub there. We were somewhat familiar with the Hot Springs area, having lived in Rapid City, South Dakota working at Ellsworth AFB as a civilian in the 70's, and our later RV trips to the Hot Springs area. The reasons we chose Hot Springs to settle in were not only the quaint rural atmosphere, but mainly to be close to the Hot Springs VA which had been highly recommended to us.

It has been increasingly difficult for me to travel due to my ailments. Being just minutes from the VA facilities here in Hot Springs has been a real blessing and comfort, not only to me, but also my wife and our children as well.

Thanking you in advance for your support in helping us Veterans retain and grow our Hot Springs VA.

Sincerely,

Joseph K. Allen, T/SGT/USAF/Ret

Hot Springs, SD 57747

IA2-1: We appreciate your service and note that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus and VA will maintain a limited presence on campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IA2-1

Commenter IA3: Carl Atchley

Commenter IA3: Carl Atchley

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Carl Atchley
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.2 1.2.2.2

Need: 2.3.5 Save the VA proposal is needed
I am a veteran and I moved here
because of the V.A. which has been
a superior facility. I am partially disabled
and my wife cannot drive me so it
will be necessary to rely on my kids.
I did not get good care at the
large V.A. in Denver, in Long Beach, CA,
Buffalo, N.Y. They were huge facilities and
the wait times were lengthy even
for emergency care.
I appreciate the peace and tranquility
of Hot Springs which outweighs any
urban facility.
I've been using this VA since 1968
and I love this community and this VA.
I always had excellent care here.

I CARL W. ATCHLEY give permission/authorization for Save the VA to
 enter this information online on my behalf.

Carl W. Atchley Feb 26, 2016
 Signature Date

IA3-1: VA appreciates your service and allegiance to the Hot Springs VAMC, and acknowledges your support for Alternative E Save the VA Proposal and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IA3-1

Commenter IA4: Donna Atchley

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Donna Atchley
 Address: [Redacted] Hot Springs SD 57777
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____
 EIS Section: 1.2.2.2
 EIS Statement: Distance Veterans must travel for care.

Comment: Being married to a disabled Veteran, with a number of serious health problems, I'm concerned with the distance to the facility he'll have to go to for care.

Right now he goes weekly to our Hot Springs VA, & it's 10 minutes from our house. When he has an emergency where his life depends on getting to the VA, & it's well over an hour away, he could die. As his wife I'm the one to drive & my eye sight isn't good, our car is old & our budget limited.

EIS Section: 3.1.1, 2.2.
 EIS Statement: Fire/rescue & Emergency service.

Comment: We live in an area where wild fires forest fires happen a lot & we depend on the back up our Hot Springs, VA. Fire department in helping our Volunteer fire department. A large percent of our homes in Hot Springs are older as is the people who live here, and we need the help of their plan power & equipment of the VA Fire department.

IA4-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled, purchased care option and quality of care.

IA4-2: Relocation of the RRTP would eliminate VA BHHCS onsite fire department which is required to support VA medical facilities operating 24 hours a day. However, VA notes that requests for assistance in the past have been very infrequent and VA is confident that the Hot Springs volunteer fire department will be able to provide the necessary fire protection to the residents of Hot Springs.

IA4-1

IA4-2

Commenter IA4: Donna Atchley

EIS Section: 3.1.6, 2.3.

EIS Statement: Housing.

Comment:

we moved here in 1997 from an area (denver) that had a overworked, V.A. where you felt like a number, not a person. you waited sometimes a month for an appointment & the care was awful. we heard how good & caring the Hot Springs V.A. was & after investigating the facility, we sold our house in Colorado & moved here to Hot Springs & all our money we put into our home here will be lost as when the V.A. closes our housing market will be flooded with people moving & our businesses will close.

EIS Section: 2.3.5

EIS Statement: Alternative E, Save the VA proposal.

Comment:

Keep the Hot Springs V.A open and back to the efficient excellent facility it once was, giving complete & wonderful care to all the Veterans that entered their facility

IA4-3: See group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts and potential cumulative impacts on the local Hot Springs community. VA would maintain a presence on the campus under the new preferred Alternative A-2.

A4-4: VA acknowledges your support for Alternative E, Save the VA proposal and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

IA4-3

IA4-4

Commenter IA4: Donna Atchley

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I, Donna Atchley give permission/authorization for Sam Peterson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Donna Atchley _____ Feb 25, 2016
Signature Date

Commenter IA5: Dustin Atchley

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Dustin Atchley
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: ~~1.2.2.2~~ ~~1.2.2.2~~ 3.10.2.2 3.10.2.

Need: To keep our VA in Hot Springs 2.3.5
My father is a veteran and my uncle -
and they both use this V.A. They are
too old to move and other family members
would have to drive them for care
My father and Uncle moved here because
of the V.A. - Subsequently 50 of us
family members lived here. If this
 Purpose: V.A. closes it would be a burden on us
non-veterans.

IA5-1

IA5-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response Sections E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

VA also acknowledges your support for Alternative Save the VA proposal and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

I, Dustin W. Atchley give permission/authorization for Save the VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

D. W. Atchley 2-26-16
 Signature Date

Commenter IA6: Lynn Adams

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 1, 2015 3:45 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Battle Mountain

-----Original Message-----
From: Lynn Adams [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2015 1:00 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Battle Mountain

Gentlemen:

as a descendant of an earlier generation of veterans, I am opposed to any plan that would reduce VA services in a particular area, forcing veterans to drive a lot further for their care.

L. Adams

IA6-1: VA acknowledges your support for health services that do not require Veterans to drive longer distances. Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IA6-1

Commenter IA7: Ebum Adelona

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, April 19, 2016 2:28 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Comments on EIS Hot SpringsVA
Attachments: ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT.docx

From: E adelona [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 18, 2016 8:14 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on EIS Hot SpringsVA

Attached are my responses to the EIS

Ebum Adelona
Hot Springs, SD

Commenter IA7: Eburn Adelona

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) COMMENT SHEET

Name: Eburn Adelona

Address: [REDACTED] Hot Springs SD 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Release Information to Congressional Committees yes

Section: 1.2.2.1.1 The impact statement speaks to a problem recruitment and retaining qualified staff and maintaining clinical competencies. This factor is a result of a decision to down size which dates back to 1990. The capacity of the domiciliary has been reduced from 200 beds to 100 beds and other medical services have been reduced or transferred to other locations. The reduction of services results in reduction of qualified staff. In particular the reduction of service availability for the treatment of PTSD is occurring at a time when the number of service members with PTSD is double the previously projected numbers. The Hot springs VA facility has recognized strength in PTSD and related substance abuse treatment. The Joint Commission has not identified any significant systemic quality issues at the Hot springs Campus.

Section: 1.2.2.2.1 Distance Veterans must travel for care. Hot Springs VA services veterans from the southern Black Hills, Pine Ridge, as well as Veterans from Wyoming, and Nebraska. It is a critical rural access point for 10,000 rural and highly rural veterans. Travel time to services in the absence of the Hot Springs VA campus is increased 60 minutes to Rapid City and 100 minutes to Ft Meade for patients who live south, east and west of Hot Springs. Currently a significant number of veterans are now required to drive an additional 180 miles to and from Ft. Meade for a 15 minute appointment. For veterans from Pine Ridge and Rose Bud travel is a significant barrier to care. The counties where these reservations are located (Oglala and Todd) are two of the three poorest counties in the United States.

Section:3.11.2.4 Impact on schools. Out of the three public school districts in Fall River County the Hot Springs district serves the children of employees of the VA Hot Springs Campus. 74% of VA employees are Hot Springs residents. The loss of employees especially families with children will impact the Hot Springs school district adversely by decreasing the number of students attending the K-12 school.

Section: 3.11.2.5 The recreational resources near the Hot Springs VA are used by the veterans. Hot springs is home to the world's largest indoor natural water thermally heated swimming pool. For thousands of years in the valley of healing

IA7-1

IA7-2

IA7-3

IA7-4

IA7-1: Past decisions relating to staffing levels and health care services are made by Veterans Health Administration professionals (leaders, planners and health care practitioners and professionals), based on a variety of factors, and are not subject to a NEPA review. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the past decline in services and the extent to which it has been considered in the Final EIS.

IA7-2: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

VA recognizes that Veterans have to travel long distances to receive care. Under all the alternatives considered care closer to home will be available.

IA7-3: The potential impact on community services has been revised to look at impacts on the community schools. See revised Sections 3.11 and 4.11 in the Final EIS.

Commenter IA7: Eburn Adelona

waters, called wiwila kata by the Lakota, the waters have soothed native people before white settlers came and "discovered" the healing waters. Many of the veterans speak to the therapeutic effect upon them that the recreational facilities especially the natural hot springs, year round swimming, hot tubs, steam rooms and gym available at Evans Plunge. This facility is within walking distance of the VA campus. In addition veterans receive a significant discount making use of the facility affordable to them. Recreational facilities in Rapid City are spread out and therefore not easily accessible. In addition the Rapid City pools contain chlorine.

IA7-4: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. There would still be opportunity for Veterans to receive health care services in Hot Springs and continue to enjoy the recreational opportunities and healing waters it provides. See also group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

Commenter IB1: John Banales

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: John BANALES JR.

Address: [REDACTED]

City: HOTSPRINGS, S.D.

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.3.5 3.10.2.1

Need: MY WIFE AND I MOVED TO HOTSPRINGS, SD FROM FORTMOHAVE AZ. TO BE CLOSED TO THE VA HOSPITAL I HAVE HAD A [REDACTED] AND I HAVE MADE SEVERAL VISITS TO THE HOSPITAL CONCERNING MY [REDACTED]

Purpose: As well as myself and family it will affect the whole town and county, if the VA pulls out of here

I [REDACTED] give permission/authorization for Mary Helen Padua to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: [Handwritten Signature] Date: FEB 20, 2016

IB1-1: VA acknowledges your comment as being in support of keeping the Hot Springs VA hospital open and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA also notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Section E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IB1-1

Commenter IB2: Norma Banales

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: NORMA Banales
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs SD.
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.1 & 3.10.2.3 & 3.10.2.5

Need: Hi My Name is Norma Banales and I live in Hot Springs SD. My husband suffers from [REDACTED] He served in the Vietnam War, we moved to HS, because of the VA Hospital we lived in Arizona and had to travel 258 miles one way for my husband

Purpose: to receive treatment, Closing the VA Hospital would be devastating for my husband and our community please do not close the VA Hospital, by doing so would cause us to move from our quiet town where my husband finds peace.

I Norma Banales give permission/authorization for Mary Helen Pedersen to enter this information online on my behalf.

Norma Banales 2-20-16
 Signature Date

IB2-1: VA acknowledges your comment as support for keeping the Hot Springs hospital open and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA also notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IB2-1

Commenter IB3: Laura Batchelor

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Laura Batchelor
 Address:  Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: _____
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: (See enclosed envelope)

Housing for Homeless Veterans

The following article appeared on the front page of the Rapid City Journal newspaper on Monday, April 11, 2016: A New Home For Vets and Pets

Purpose:

In this article written by Tom Griffith, a story of compassionate people providing housing for homeless Vets unfolds. First there are to be accommodations for 11 Vets and in 9 to 12 months, the developer expects to have all 34 units for rent. An old, shabby and dilapidated motel is being rehabbed in Wasta, S.D., a town of 80 people, 42 miles east of Rapid City in the Badlands.

As you will see in the second article enclosed, I responded to this recent newspaper article in shock and confusion as to why the Hot Springs VA facility

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date _____

IB3-1: Thank you for sharing the article as part of your comments. VA appreciates your suggestion to use the existing campus as housing for homeless Veterans. VA will consider a variety of types of adaptive reuses that could be available for the Hot Springs VAMC under Alternative G.

IB3-1

Commenter IB3: Laura Batchelor

Addition Comment:

The exact same distance from Rapid City is not being used to the fullest extent for the very needs of these homeless Veterans.

Not only does the VA facility here in Hot Springs have the capacity for hundreds of homeless Veterans now, including comprehensive wrap-around services to assist the Veterans with their health care, employability and overall well-being, we here in Hot Springs as everyday citizens want them to come here as they have for many, many years.

Laura Batchelor
Signature

April 8, 2016
Date

Commenter IB3: Laura Batchelor

Page 1 of 1

Laura Batchelor

From: "Laura Batchelor" [redacted]
Date: Monday, April 11, 2016 8:32 AM
To: <letters@rapidcityjournal.com>
Subject: Letter to the editor; Wasta motel for vets and pets

I just read the front page Journal article of Monday, April 11th. Not to deny Wasta of a new renovated motel, or Larry Fuss and his wonderful family of their compassionate entrepreneurship, but do we not have a huge VA facility here in Hot Springs with dormitory capacity for hundreds of homeless veterans including comprehensive wrap-around services to assist the veterans with their healthcare, employability and overall well-being? What say you, William "Bill" Fahrenbruck, the local VA coordinator of healthcare for homeless veterans? Are you not re-inventing a wheel all ready turning and your organization is trying to close?

-Laura Batchelor, Hot Springs

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor

editor

MAIL: Rapid City Journal, 601
Box 4520, Rapid City, SD 57109

PHONE: 394-8427

FAX: 394-8463

EMAIL: letters@
rapidcityjournal.com

Letters limited to 200 words
and must include full name,
address, phone number and
signature. We accept both
handwritten and typed letters.
Letters may be edited.

**Plenty of room for
vets in Hot Springs**

I just read the front-page
Journal article on Monday,
April 11. Not to deny Wasta
of a newly renovated motel,
or Larry Fuss and his won-
derful family of their com-
passionate entrepreneurship,
but do we not have a huge VA
facility here in Hot Springs?
With all the wrap-around
services of homeless veter-
ans, including comprehensive
wrap-around services to assist
the veterans with their health
care, employability and overall
well-being?

What say you, William "Bill"
Fahrenbruck, the local VA
coordinator of health care for
homeless veterans? Are you
not re-inventing a wheel al-
ready turning and your organi-
zation is trying to close?

- Laura Batchelor, Hot Springs

4/11/2016

Commenter IB4: Doria Belitz

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Doria Belitz
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57447
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2.1 Locations of Veteran Population

Need: Compared to VA Medical Facilities Current and Projected Veteran Population Locations

Those who deserve our country's care, should not have to relocate in order to receive VA services that they can receive in Hot Springs, SD. Distances are very great in this state and

surrounding states from where veterans must travel. Hot Springs VA Medical Facilities would save each veteran and hours of travel time to obtain needed care.

2.3.5 Alternative E - Save the VA Proposal

I Doria Belitz give permission/authorization for Sarah Peterson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Doria Belitz Date February 2, 2016

IB4-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Sections E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IB4-2: VA acknowledges your support for Alternative E, Save the VA proposal, and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

IB4-1

IB4-2

Commenter IB4: Doria Belitz

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Doria Belitz
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.2.2.2 Distance Veterans must travel for care

Need:

Consider the environmental impact of the distance traveled by Native American Veterans from the reservations. Those on the Rosebud Reservation will have to travel over 4 hours, if they will need to go to Rapid City, SD. Many have to hire and pay for transportation if the mileage is

a great distance. Consider not only Hot Springs veterans but also our veterans in all of Nebraska and Wyoming. Veterans will be relocating in Rapid City, SD and will need to find housing in a large city to be close to a care facility. Hot Springs has always been considered a safe and friendly location.

2.3.5 Alternative F - Save the VA Proposal

I Doria Belitz give permission/authorization for Sarah Peterson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Doria Belitz Date February 2, 2016

IB4-3: Native Americans would have the choice, under all the alternatives, to use either a VA or IHS system for their care as a result of a national Memorandum of Understanding that has been established between VA and Indian Health Service. They would also still be able to receive primary care through the new CBOC in Hot Springs. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IB4-3

IB4-2

Commenter IB5: Larry Belitz

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Larry Belitz
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.1.1 Difficultly Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Staff & Maintaining Clinical Comp.

Need: To date, doctors and staff enjoy the personal service they can provide to veterans in Hot Springs where they are known by name in our small town. Their families enjoy the safety and service only a dedicated Veterans' Town can offer. If the pay scale is the same, most staff prefer a safe, friendly town as Hot Springs. Many Veteran doctors and staff buy homes and retire in our town.

Purpose: _____

2.3.5 (Alternative) E - Save the VA Proposal

I Larry Belitz give permission/authorization for Sarah Petersen to enter this information online on my behalf.

Larry Belitz Signature Date Feb. 2, 2016

IB5-1: VA salaries (i.e., ability to compete with private practices) is an issue and recruiting to Hot Springs still continues to be a problem as described in Chapter 1 of the EIS.

IB5-2: VA acknowledges your support of Alternative E, Save the VA proposal and has included it in the public record for this EIS.

IB5-1

IB5-2

Commenter IB6: Kay Benson

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Kay Benson

Address: [REDACTED], Oral, SD 57746

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: None

EIS Section: 2.3.5

EIS Statement: Save the VA Proposal

Comment: I am in total agreement with this proposal and feel we do need additional care at this facility. We need to improve and expand services here in Hot Springs.

IB6-1

EIS Section: 3.10.2.4

EIS Statement: Income

Comment: Local economy will be devastated by closing or moving OUR VA.

IB6-2

EIS Section: 3.10.2.6

EIS Statement: VA BHHCS Employment

Comment: VA employment for WWII veterans or family members gave them a place to work along with property ownership in the local area and allowed them to raise their families and keep the farms working (with one or more members working at the VA).

IB6-1: VA acknowledges your support for Alternative E, Save the VA proposal and is making it part of the public record for this EIS.

IB6-2: See group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E related to the socioeconomic impacts on the local community from the proposed reconfiguration.

Commenter IB6: Kay Benson

EIS Section: 3.11.21.1

EIS Statement: Hot Springs and Fall River County

Comment: Our taxes will be raised by closing the VA or continually reducing services and care of our veterans. The reduction of staff will reduce all services and surrounding area.

IB6-2

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Date

Commenter IB6: Kay Benson

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I Kay Benson give permission/authorization for Janette VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

Kay Benson Signature Date 1-25-16

Commenter IB7: Leonard Benson

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Leonard Benson

Address: [Redacted] Oral SD 57766

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: lkbenson@gwtc.net

EIS Section: Executive Summary

EIS Statement: Purpose is to provide quality care

Comment: this proposal is not going to benefit the veterans. This will not save money in the long run. This proposal is not economically feasible. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure this out. If this plan is implemented it will prove that this process does not work. Why do you want to kill a small town to make a big community larger. In my opinion this displays a lack of intelligence of our country's leaders.

IB7-1

IB7-1. VA thanks you for your comment and opinion.

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Date

Commenter IB7: Leonard Benson

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I LEONARD BENSON give permission/authorization for SAVE THE VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

Leonard Benson 1-25-16
Signature Date

Commenter IB8: Lynnete Bentson

of service
 Addition Comment: Hot Springs, SD is a delightful,
rare gem of a town which deserves to
survive. The negative economic impact of
the threat of closure of the VA facility has
already been felt in this town for the last
20 years, as the VA Administration
has slowly but steadily been bleeding it
and ~~draining~~ draining away its life blood.

At one time, this facility was almost self-sustaining.
Veterans in residence found exercise in the tending the
gardens + ~~the~~ greenhouse, which grew enough produce
for the hospital, & some for the town. The facility
raised extra money for expenses by contracting
out laundry services for other business in town. I
understand that at that time they also ran a
"speaks on wheels" program for hospitals. These are just a
few of the many services the VA Admin has cut
over the years.

Lynnete S. Bentson 2-5-2016
 Signature Date

Commenter IB9: Roger Bentson

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Roger D Bentson

Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, South Dakota 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.3.5 Alternative E - Save the VA proposal

Need: The services provided by the VA need to be expanded, keeping jobs and services, here.

Purpose: Saves the city of Hot Springs from total collapse. Taking away the jobs provided by the VA would quite possibly be a disaster. Schools could close, restaurants could close, etc. Along with that the cost of services provided by the city would rise or at the very least be reduced. Property taxes would go up - a disaster for people living on a fixed income and make living difficult for myself and my wife. We just moved here only to find that Hot Springs will soon be a ghoet town.

I Roger Bentson give permission/authorization for Lynette Bentson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date Jan. 26th, 2016

IB9-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at Hot Springs (Alternative E, Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IB9-2: See group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the analysis of potential socioeconomic impacts and potential cumulative impacts on the local community in the Final EIS.

IB9-1

IB9-2

Commenter IB9: Roger Bentson

Duplicate of previous page.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: ROGER D. BENTSON

Address: [REDACTED]

HOT SPRINGS, SD 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.3.5 Alternative E - Save the VA proposal

Need: Expanding the VA in Hot Springs. Keeping jobs and services here.

Purpose: Saves the city of Hot Springs from total collapse. Taking away the jobs provided by the VA would quite possibly be a disaster. Schools could close, restaurants, etc along with reduced services at a much higher cost to individuals such as myself and my wife. We just moved here only to find that my property taxes will skyrocket and Hot Springs will soon be a ghost town.

I Roger Bentson give permission/authorization for Lyn Bentson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Roger D. Bentson Signature Date JAN 2015

Commenter IB10: Robert Beolinger

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Robert Beolinger, Jr.
Address: [Redacted]
Denver, CO. 80208
Phone: [Redacted]
e-mail: [Redacted]
Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: If it wasn't for the VA med Center in HS, I would NOT be [Redacted] again due to the fact I was [Redacted] 11 years ago for a crime I did not commit, & was put on probation & fined \$1,500. I got angry & [Redacted] in Colorado Springs which did not help.

Purpose: So I was sent to HS. on Dec 9th 2015. Since I've been here, I find the Staff has been very supportive & I am 100% better than I was before coming here. I am positive that by the time I leave, I will be [Redacted] the best of my life, due to the fact that they have a wonderful Substance Abuse & PTSD program.

The facilities is beautiful, the food is good & the people really care about our ability.

I Robert Beolinger give permission/authorization for LYN Bentsen to enter this information online on my behalf.

Robert Beolinger 1/24/16
Signature Date

IB10-1: Thank you for sharing your story about your positive treatment experience at the Hot Springs VAMC. We appreciate your service and wish you a successful recovery.

IB10-1

Commenter IB11: Ron Bergen

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Ron Bergen

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: Hot Springs VA is used by many vets. We were promised free hospitalation if we served during war time. Now we are losing this. Vets are the reason we have the freedom we have. Please keep your promise.

Purpose: _____

I Ron Bergen give permission/authorization for Hot Springs VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Ronald P. By Date: 4-23-16

IB11-1: VA acknowledges your comment as support to keep the existing hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS. VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the needs of today's Veterans as well as the needs of those in the future. While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IB11-1

Commenter IB12: Richard Bershon

Commenter IB12: Richard Bershon

SAVE THE VA LETTER

It is not about saving Hot Springs or school districts, etc. Although closing the Hot Springs VA Medical Center (VAMC) would have some negative consequences for these things it has not been the emphasis of the save the VA advocates. It is not the mission of the VA Health Care system to save or perpetuate communities. It is to provide the best possible and accessible medical care for veterans!

I began working in the VA Health Care System at the Biloxi, Mississippi Medical Center in August, 1974, as a GS11. I was promoted to GS12 the next year. In late 1977, I was promoted to GM13 and assigned to the VA Medical Center in Tomah, Wisconsin. I remained there until I retired in November 1990. I came to Hot Springs to work in the VAMC part-time under contract in November, 1994. At that time I also began to work part-time at the South Dakota State Veterans Home. After about three years I stopped working at the Hot Springs VAMC but continued at the South Dakota State Veterans Home until I retired in November 2006. I am also a veteran having served in the Air Force and Army with over 30 years, active and reserve, with two tours in Korea and one in Vietnam. I feel I know something about veterans and the VA medical care system.

With regard to the EIS, 1.2.2.1.1 recruiting and retaining qualified staff should not be a major problem. Some professional people prefer to live in large cities. Others prefer to live, work and raise children in smaller, friendlier and safer areas. Hot Springs was recently ranked as the third safest city in South Dakota.

With Regard to EIS 1.2.2.2.2 Distance veterans must travel. The Hot Springs VAMC serves veterans from western South Dakota and Nebraska and a large area from Wyoming. Closing it adds at least 55 miles one way for most veterans served in Hot Springs, including many Native American veterans from the Pine Ridge Reservation. This adds cost and additional hardships for them.

With regard to 3.11.2.1.1 The Hot Springs VAMC can better continue to serve through RRTP homeless veterans. Problems such as PTSD, substance abuse, alcohol abuse and other conditions are better treated in smaller community settings where staffs tend to be more stable. They get to know the veteran patients better. Veterans undergoing treatment are more apt to be unnoticeable and less likely to have relapses than they do in larger facilities and cities. Hot Springs "The Veterans Town" appreciates veterans and cares for them.

The new veterans home built in Hot Springs cost over 30 million dollars. When I first started working at the Home the Superintendent used to say we were the VAMC's best customer. Now the VAMC does not treat the veterans living there. That is ludicrous. The Hot Springs VAMC was always considered one of the best in the system until it began to downsize with the intent to close it. With all the complaints about veterans care in many VAMC's why in the world do you want to close one that most all the

IB12-1: VA maintains that recruiting remains a problem for the Hot Springs VAMC as described in Chapter 1 of the EIS.

IB12-2: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled concerns.

IB12-3: See revised Section 1.2.2.3 in the Final EIS for additional reasons why VA believes the RRTP should be relocated to Rapid City.

IB12-4: VA believes that the proposed reconfiguration will improve the overall quality of care provided to our Veterans in the BHHCS service area.

IB12-5: VA acknowledges your support for Alternative E Save the VA proposal to expand existing services on the Hot Springs campus and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IB12-1

IB12-2

IB12-3

IB12-4

IB12-5

Commenter IB12: Richard Bershon

veterans who have been served by the Hot Springs VAMC are fighting so hard to keep it open and restored to its previous condition?

Richard Y. Bershon

Commenter IB13: Frank Birkholt

Commenter IB13: Frank Birkholt

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Frank R. Birkholt
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]
 Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: It seems the VA closing is a horrible waste of resources. The VA has been actively starved in Hot Springs for the last 30 years. As the VA has shrank services in hot springs have closed making my life less enjoyable and unsustainable.

Purpose: I have been a resident of Hot Springs for 46 years the business environment has had a precipitous decline over the last 35 years and the closing of the VA will destroy what is left of this town

I Frank Birkholt give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: [Signature] Date: 4-23-16

IB13-1: VA acknowledges your support for keeping the existing Hot Springs VAMC hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus and VA would maintain a limited presence on campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care. See also See group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the analysis of potential socioeconomic impacts and potential cumulative impacts on the local community in the Final EIS.

IB13-1

Commenter IB14: Judith Bredlau

Commenter IB14: Judith Bredlau

IB14-1: Thank you for your comment.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Judith Bredlau
Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
Phone: [Redacted]
e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.3.5 3.10.2.1

Need: affect family; friends; grand children

Purpose: To keep Hot Springs a viable and sustainable community.

IB14-1

I, Judith Bredlau give permission/authorization for Nancy Helen Pedersen to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Judith Bredlau Date 2-19-16

Commenter IB15: Leona Broces

Commenter IB15: Leona Brocos

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Leona Brown

Address: [Redacted]

West Spring 50 Dnt 67747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: The VA Hospital is needed & used by all veterans. It will allow to care by our veterans now & in the future.

Purpose: _____

I Leona Brown give permission/authorization for you to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Leona Brown Date April 23 - 2016

IB15-1: VA acknowledges your support for keeping the existing hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IB16: Wanda Black Feather

Commenter IB16: Wanda Black Feather

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Wanda Black Feather

Address: [Redacted]

RC, SD 57701

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Health care important! I
have [Redacted] So please
keep the hospital open

2.3.5 Alternative E Save

Purpose: the J.A Proposal

I Wanda Black Feather give permission/authorization for Samantha Pector
enter this information online on my behalf.

[Signature]
Signature Date 11/14

1B16-1: VA acknowledges your support for Alternative E Save the VA proposal and keeping the existing hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IB17: Erroll Brown Eyes

Commenter IB17: Erroll Brown Eyes

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: ERROLL E. BROWN EYES
 Address: [REDACTED]
CHADRON, NE. 69337
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: n/a

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2 Distance Cost must have

Need: I have 5 appointments at the VA in Hot Springs in the next 2 weeks. If the VA closes I will have to travel 1 hour longer to get services in rapid. I had 2 brothers & a nephew & they were treated so

Purpose: well. The Hot Springs VA had cancer & treated me well. I was not number, like I was treated at the Minn VA.

2.3.5 Alternative E Save the VA Proposal

I [Signature] give permission/authorization for [Signature] enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: [Signature] Date: 11 June 2016

IB17-1: Thank you for your comment and sharing your positive experience with the Hot Springs facility. VA acknowledges your support for Alternative E Save the VA proposal and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

See also group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

Commenter IB18: Emerson Bailey

Commenter IB18: Emerson Bailey

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Monday, April 11, 2016 6:28 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Emerson Bailey: Vietnam vet with request to keep Hot Springs, SD campus OPEN

From: Computer Guy 451 [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 23, 2016 12:25 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Emerson Bailey: Vietnam vet with request to keep Hot Springs, SD campus OPEN

Greetings to those who have decision authority on the Hot Springs campus status,

I was diagnosed with [REDACTED] in 2005 through the VA Hot Springs facility. My primary care doctor was able to spend time with me--instead of being rushed with the crushing workload experienced at other VA facilities--which literally **saved my life!** Suicidal thoughts and ideations were dominant in my mind, but I had no idea why or where they originated.

IB18-1

As an FMF (Fleet Marine Force) Hospital Corpsman, I saw and worked with the worst of the wounded Marines--both in-country and in Intensive Care Units onboard the USS Valley Forge (LPH-8) and USS Tripoli (LPH-10). We worked 16 hours every day, 7 days a week in ICU--and in-country we were "on" 24/7. I'm qualified to wear the Navy/Marine Combat Action Ribbon with FMF insignia.

The Hot Springs VA campus is a significant and positive factor in the healing process for veterans, and those of us with a 100% service-connected disability (70% for [REDACTED] plus 30% for [REDACTED]) have come to depend on the folks there. They treat the vets with respect and dignity, and if the Hot Springs facility is closed we will either have to go to a non-VA care facility--where we will just be another nameless patient--or we will have to drive an even greater distance to Fort Meade or some other facility not yet built.

My round trip drive for a single VA appointment is over 200 miles to Hot Springs (from Gordon, Nebraska). Having to drive to Rapid City or Sturgis for care will be a significant increase in driving, and it will also be a significant increase in travel pay (a factor which apparently has not been given appropriate weighting in the final decision to close Hot Springs' VA campus).

IB18-2

I have an MBA in Management Science, and we were always taught to consider the entire scope of a project instead of focusing only on isolated details. It seems that someone--or several "someones"--have an agenda that includes building a new facility in Rapid City. To afford that construction project, they feel they must close Hot Springs VA Black Hills--a truly **horrible** prospect for me and many others.

IB18-3

IB18-1: Thank you for your service and for sharing your positive treatment experience at the Hot Springs facility.

IB18-2: See group response in Section E.3.3 of Appendix E relating to purchased care options and the concerns over quality of care from community providers.

IB18-3: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

Commenter IB18: Emerson Bailey	
<p>A facility in Rapid City will necessarily be more inherently stressful than the Hot Springs site. Hot Springs' campus is isolated vertically from the rest of the city, and this provides a comfort zone separating us from the traffic and city noise occurring in any populated area. It is a peaceful haven with healing benefits not found at any other VA facility I've visited. An alternate site in Rapid City would not have this peaceful isolation, and we would have to deal with city traffic, noise, and associated stressors common to larger cities.</p> <p>It would seem reasonable to have me go to a local hospital, but the hospital in Gordon has such a bad reputation that I will not go there (except when VA folks come down and visit the hospital). I had a close friend who was misdiagnosed at the Gordon hospital, and he died as a direct result of that misdiagnosis and resulting delay to reach a hospital (Rapid City Regional) with proper staff and facilities.</p> <p>Would Rapid City Regional hospital be a fit alternative to the Hot Springs campus? In some ways "yes", but in others--like the non-stressful environment on the hill in Hot Springs--I would have to say "no." Being "just another patient" at any hospital outside of the VA system goes <i>against</i> the promise and commitment made to us as soldiers that we would be properly cared for when injured or in need of medical services.</p> <p>Instead of closing the VA Black Hills facility in Hot Springs, South Dakota, please keep it OPEN and fully-supported with the needed staff. When my clinical psychologist retired, not only was she not replaced--except with <i>locum tenens</i> docs--but the super-helpful PTSD support group was simply eliminated. No more group, no more support as a group of veterans familiar with each other and willing to support each other. My present psychiatrist, although excellent in all respects, is in Baltimore, Maryland. We must communicate via television. There is nothing--in my mind--to compare to the quality of care we should receive by sitting across from a person in our same room.</p> <p>Please contact me at this address with any questions you might have about my statements, and I will do my best to convince you to KEEP THE VA HOT SPRINGS FACILITY OPEN!</p> <p>Thank you for considering my comments,</p> <p>Emerson R Bailey, HM2 (Hospital Corpsman attached to the Marines in VietNam, 1967-1968)</p>	<p>IB18-4</p> <p>IB18-2</p> <p>IB18-2</p> <p>IB18-5</p> <p>IB18-4: VA appreciates your concerns related to a move to Rapid City, which really only affects the RRTP. The reasons for this move have been described more fully in Section 1.2.2.3 of the Final EIS.</p> <p>IB18-5: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing facilities at Hot Springs VAMC open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.</p> <p>VA also notes that under the preferred alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus and VA would maintain a limited presence there.</p>

Commenter IB19: Rachel Baltazar

Commenter IB19: Rachel Baltazar

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2016 6:35 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Question about resources for US veterans

From: Rachel Carmela Baltazar [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, January 26, 2016 11:32 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Question about resources for US veterans

Hi there,

I discovered this page http://www.blackhills.va.gov/services/polytrauma_system_of_care.asp with references to resource for veterans that I thought were really valuable.

I wanted to get in touch with the person who is responsible in managing it. Are you that person, if not, can you forward me to the right one?

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Thank you.

Rachel

IB19-1: Thank you for your efforts to share the link to this resource with the VA, and with Veterans, their families and other members of the public who are reading this EIS.

IB19-1

Commenter IB20: Lesly Bennett

Commenter IB20: Lesly Bennett

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 16, 2015 11:30 AM
Cc: Wittman, Glenn (CFM)
Subject: FW: Hot Springs VA

From: Bennett, Lesly J.
Sent: Friday, November 06, 2015 8:41 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: Hot Springs VA

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to first comment on the EIS study for the closing of the Hot Springs VA. I have worked at this facility for the last 26 years. The majority of patients comments on their health care have always been positive. We have a huge Nebraska patient base, Native American population from Pine Ridge, Rosebud, Kyle, and local veterans, (even Rapid City) veterans that consistently tell me of the excellent care they receive here. Despite all the staffing cuts the staff keeps delivering top quality care. There is a lot to be said of the work ethic of these fine people. I feel honored to work alongside veterans and dedicated civilian staff.

In the last four years I can count on one hand the veterans that don't care if this facility is here or not. We as employees have continued to work while the talk of closing our fine facility looms over us daily. I've had nights of sleeplessness due to the constant reminder of this process.

The Veteran Affairs in Washington DC, doesn't even have the respect for the staff and veterans to come and see our facility and talk to the local veterans. Does that show they care for the people they serve? What does that say about the people they claim to care for and serve? President Franklin Roosevelt used to sneak out of the White House, drive around the countryside and ask the people he served what they needed. Then worked hard to deliver the needed help.

Now to address this as a land owner. I have worked to 2 blocks away from my job for 26 years and grew up that same distance away from the VA. The land I have invested in will have a significant devaluation if the facility closes. Many of my husband's customers are employed by the VA so the closing would affect our other income greatly.

The staff have who have chosen to continue to work here have put their hearts and souls into to making Hot Springs VA (as a Native American Woman told me), "This is a sacred and healing place. You can feel it when you come through the door."

Sincerely,
 Lesly J Bennett, RN
 Hot Springs VA Specialty Clinic

IB20-1: VA appreciates and values your service, work and devotion to your job at the Hot Springs VAMC. Under all of the alternatives VA would continue to provide outpatient services in Hot Springs and, under preferred Alternative A-2, VA would maintain a presence on the existing campus. VA has also committed that no VA employee would lose their job.

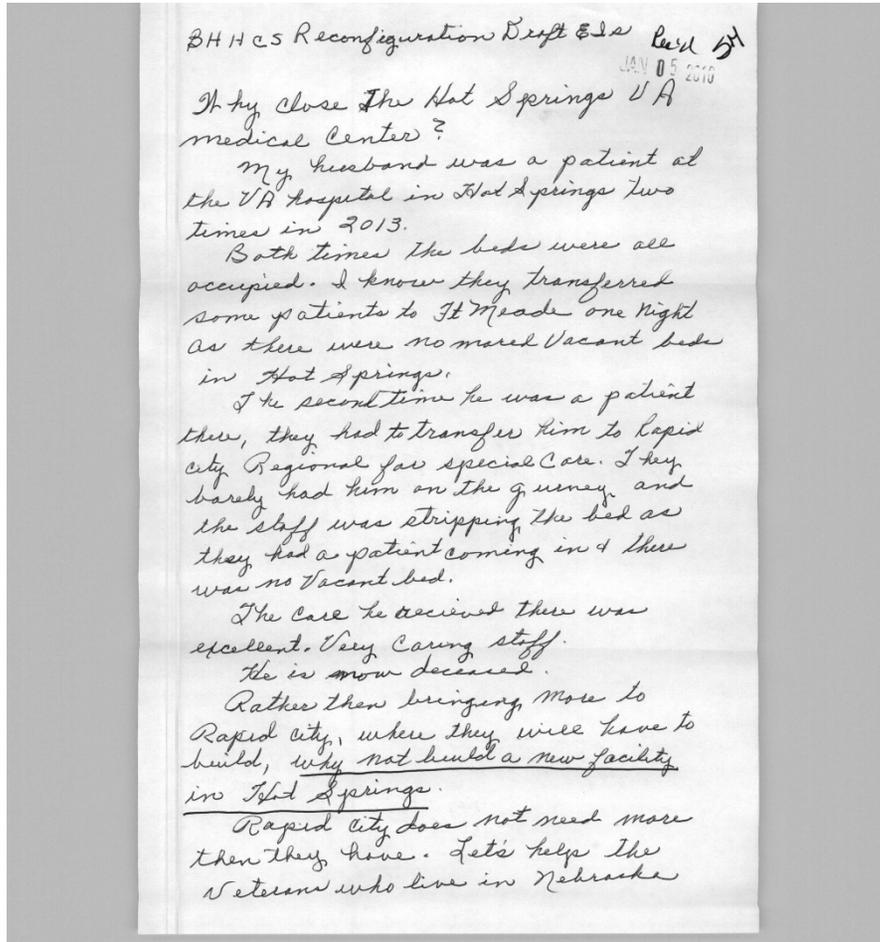
IB20-2: VA understands the potential for adverse impacts on the local economy and has expanded the analysis of socioeconomic impacts and cumulative impacts to include impacts on the local community (see Sections 4.10 and 4.16 of the Final EIS).

IB20-1

IB20-2

Commenter IB21: Gladys Bassett

Commenter IB21: Gladys Bassett



IB21-1

IB21-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing Hot Springs facility open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS. VA also appreciates your positive feedback on the quality of care your husband received at the Hot Springs facility in the past.

IB21-2: Building a new CBOC and a new CBOC/RRTP in Hot Springs were evaluated in the EIS (Alternatives A-1 and B respectively). Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Only the RRTP would move to Rapid City, for reasons described in Section 1.2.2.3 of the Final EIS.

There are no plans to build a new hospital - in either Hot Springs or Rapid City - to replace the existing hospital. Rather, Veterans now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IB21-3: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to how the proposed reconfiguration addresses concerns over distance travelled.

IB21-2

IB21-3

Commenter IB21: Gladys Bassett

Wyoming, eastern S.D & Montana
have a closer facility.

I remember a year or two back
when Rapid City Regional Hospital
had to transfer patients to Spring Falls
as they had no room.

I had several of my family who
served their country. 1st husband
w.W.II, 2nd husband 1954-1957,
son 20 years in A.F. Father WW I
3 brothers 10 years from 1949 on
plus uncles & cousins.

This is my recommendation for
BHHCS Reconfiguration Draft EIS.

Please keep the Hot Springs
VA Hospital open.

Sincerely
Gladys F. Bassett

[REDACTED]
R.C. S.D. 57701
[REDACTED]

IB21-
1

Commenter IB22: Laura Batchelor

Commenter IB22: Laura Batchelor

Page 1 of 4

SH
Rec'd
12-4-15

Laura Batchelor

From: "Laura Batchelor" [REDACTED]
Date: Saturday, November 28, 2015 9:43 AM
Subject: SEIS

To: EIS Review board
From: Laura Batchelor
Re: NEPA environmental review/public input - regarding the EIS of the Black Hills VA in Hot Springs, SD

I am a private citizen and homeowner in Hot Springs, SD speaking to the de-escalation of the Veterans Hospital in our town and the possible closure of this 105 year old picturesque set of buildings. My father-in-law, D K Batchelor from Crief, Scotland was one of the stone masons who came deliberately in 1903 to specifically help with the beautiful sandstone masonry. He stayed on in Hot Springs, married and had a child after the VA was built, three to six years later, as did many who built the buildings of the VA. They, then built the community of Hot Springs, around the facility. So my family knows well the intertwining marriage of the VA and the citizens of the City of Hot Springs. One did not come without the other. My family knows how sturdy these buildings are - much like the well built historic buildings of Europe still standing today and used because of such craftsman. And is, I am sure, why this - one of the first VA's in the country - was declared a 'national treasure' in 2011, by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the same declaration as is held by The White House, in Washington, DC.

As you may or may not know, the age of the buildings has been used as one of the reasons to close the VA, even though almost completely retrofitted for ADA Compliance and other code requirements before this review began*. And, without consideration of the campus holding the highest standard for historic buildings and what that commitment/upkeep costs must be by law**. And, without absolutely no regard that Veterans need health care now, not in tents, but in already working hospital buildings***.

*** It is my understanding that Veterans have (for a long period of time now) needed immediate health care as we speak (today), not years down the line after new buildings are built.

* The buildings are in good shape and are being used now - even though no one in charge of these claims comes to check on this fact.

* If this campus is not available to those veterans on the Pine Ridge Reservation, in Nebraska, Colorado, and western South Dakota, these folks will have to drive 90

11/28/2015

IB22-1: Thank you for sharing your history and connection with the VA buildings at Hot Springs.

VA has revised statements about the suitability of using the historic buildings to indicate that it can be done, although it would be costly (see Section 1.2.2.2 and Section 2.3 relating to the alternative descriptions); see also group response in table E-2 of Appendix E relating to Accessibility and Needed Renovations.

IB22-2: Under the proposed reconfiguration, Veterans now have more options to receive care from community providers closer to where they live. This has been clarified in the Final EIS (Section 2.2). See also group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

IB22-1

IB22-2

Commenter IB22: Laura Batchelor

Page 2 of 4

miles (one way) more to get to the Sturgis campus, on top of the 50 miles they drive to Hot Springs. Just think of that when going for a colonoscopy or a heart issue, just for starters. Plus many vets are short on family support to drive them.

* Allocating money in congress is no little thing. The difference between constructing new costly buildings (just ask Denver), and retrofitting what is very useable now, is huge. Plus presenting, cost effectiveness, to congress makes for a greater chance of getting money; as parallel to retrofitting buildings...one can provide proposed health care to the veterans at the same time.

** What would be the cost of mothballing a national treasure?

** What are the plans for this type VA structure, once it is emptied of VA services for the Vets? Nothing of this has been mentioned to the City of Hot Springs. Does the review board know that this VA facility has a large amount of dormitory space that once housed 3 to 5 hundred veterans who no longer had homes because they went to war and came back wounded?

Above, I mentioned the marriage between the VA and the City of Hot Springs which has worked so well for at least for 105 years. It is a marriage that can be saved as the marriage really had no problems, until bureaucratic behavior entered the picture....much like some slick Willie passing off ulterior motives and very distorted numbers and facts about this Black Hills Health Care System known as the VA in Hot Springs. It has always worked well. It even adopted programs to keep up with PTSD and addiction needs of the veterans. In fact it was underused (as apposed to the accused deficiencies) – because no one needing to know the facts came personally to see what is here and could be expanded more. Instead a paper trail began and like all bureaucratic methods started this telephone game of passing misunderstood information all around and even in the newspapers today..... that began to screw everyone involved, especially the VA employees. And, now is trying to do the same to the VA's partner, and even more – by wounding the City of Hot Springs deeply, its business and its citizens.

- People like living in Hot Springs. It is a population of 4500 diverse people in a picturesque banana belt environment.

The weather, the water, the air, the attitude of the people, and the environment which surrounds them, is the best of the best.

- VA employees like living here and raising their families as did my father-in-law; as do the citizens of Hot Springs who are for the most part retired. The cost of living is low. And the golfing, fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, snowmobiling are fabulous stress relievers.

11/28/2015

IB22-3

IB22-3: Section 2.3 of the Final EIS provides an additional breakout of the costs of each alternative, allowing a better comparison between new construction and renovation costs. In this instance, renovation costs associated with the Battle Mountain Sanitarium, a National Historic Landmark, are higher than new construction.

IB22-4

IB22-4: VA has committed to a long-term preservation plan that builds upon existing mothballing guidance. This plan will be developed by an experienced professional once closures are known. The cost of such a program is not known at this time. Additional information is provided in group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to mothballing costs.

Note- If VA decides to vacate all or a portion of the campus, long-term preservation may not be necessary if a reuse partner is identified.

IB22-5

IB22-5: VA is aware of the large role it plays as a major employer in the town of Hot Springs and is concerned about the potential economic impacts as well. These are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.16 of the Final EIS. VA will take steps to help minimize the economic losses. However, VA believes that the proposed reconfiguration is necessary to provide the quality of care our Veterans need and deserve.

Commenter IB22: Laura Batchelor

Page 3 of 4

- Vets who doctor at the VA stay on here. Plus their retired parents follow them here to be with them for support; and near the grandchildren of course..... who can not afford to come elsewhere to the grandparents. Herein lies a hidden issue for a vet, that constantly goes unaddressed. Vets need someone else to transport them to doctor appointments. Their spouse is often, unable due to working, provide this service for them. This of course brings up another issue....that is the issue of how services once at the VA here in Hot Springs were moved to the Sturgis facility when they were originally here. Just one example: Surgery only there, not here. There are many more.

What does closing the VA facility here in Hot Springs mean to me, as a retired person?

- First of all, it means at least 300 less people in our town.
- Fewer people on their off-time from work.. enjoying small town community living, like the Art Fair, Christmas In The Hills Festivals, less volunteer labor for the food banks, boys and girls clubs, at school functions.
- It means my taxes will go up.
- It means lesser students in the schools.
- It means businesses will close due to lack of workers and vets to support them.
- It means our great partnership with the government employer and workers is leaving us. Uncle Sam is taking a hike after a tremendous amount of support from this community....when it is not necessary. That is the hard part. There is grief amongst the VA workers now, due to just the suggestion of a divorce. We, the HS citizens, will suffer the huge fallout if this ugly divorce --- when there is still much to offer the veterans as Hot Springs always has--- as their wounds mend. This is the damaging knowledge being thrust upon us. Something so unjustifiable---and therefore justifiable as again another government decision not for the people, but by the crazy people. Yes psychologically and economically the de-escalation of the VA, will be deep and great in an already crazy world.

-Modernity is pushing people, once enslaved to the big cities, to want to live in places like Hot Springs....due to the slower pace, the closeness of the community, the personal touch wherever you go. We are all feeling the need to be quiet, just to sustain ourselves, and we consider ourselves among the physically and mentally healthy.

My sense (as a retired psychotherapist) is that it is always the disorder of bureaucracy that kills the golden goose. And sad as it is, this very familiar bureaucratic lack of integrity and disorder is upon us now....not unlike the disease of cancer or war.... to claim victims in a blink of the eye....as broken people always will..... rather than support its good people in the values and dignity the United

11/28/2015

IB22-6

IB22-6: VA thanks you for your personal perspective and acknowledges your support for keeping the existing Hot Springs VAMC open. It has been made part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IB22: Laura Batchelor

page 4 of 4

States of America claims to fight for and give to a human being.

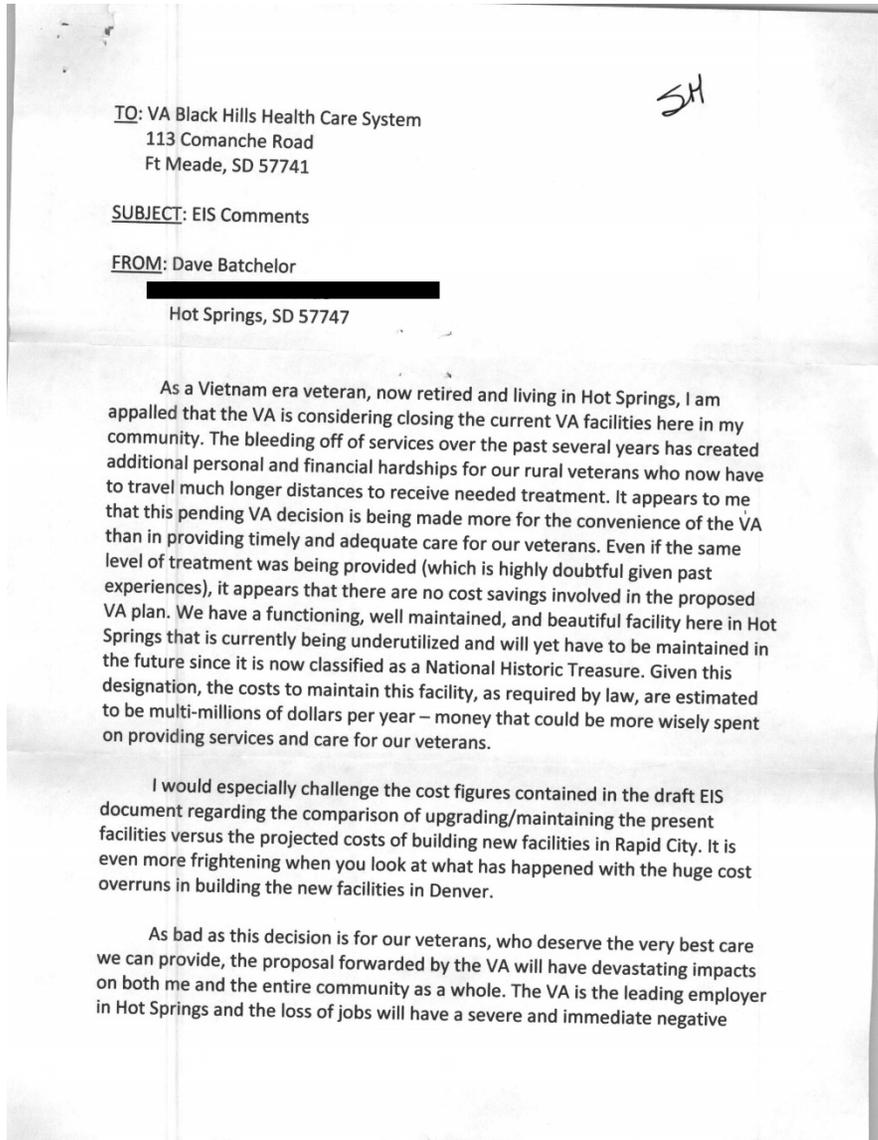
Sincerely,
Laura Batchelor

[REDACTED]
Hot Spring, SD 57747
[REDACTED]

11/28/2015

Commenter IB23: Dave Batchelor

Commenter IB23: Dave Batchelor



IB23-1: VA has committed to implementing a long-term preservation plan for buildings that will be unoccupied for more than three months as a way to minimize effects to the Battle Mountain Sanitarium National Historic Landmark.

IB23-2: With respect to the current estimates for the proposed reconfiguration, VA has re-visited and re-verified our assumptions, design criteria, and resulting cost estimates for the alternatives and believes them to be accurate based on the information available at the time they were developed. However, VA is unable to update the cost information provided in the EIS due to current appropriation restrictions. VA has provided a more detailed breakout of costs for each alternative in Section 2.3 of the Final EIS. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the cost of alternatives.

IB23-3: VA is aware of the big role it plays as a major employer in the town of Hot Springs and is concerned about the potential economic impacts as well. These are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.16 of the Final EIS. VA will take steps to help minimize the economic losses. However, VA believes that the proposed reconfiguration is necessary to provide the quality of care our Veterans need and deserve.

IB23-1

IB23-2

IB23-3

Commenter IB23: Dave Batchelor

financial and personal consequences. The loss of these employees will mean fewer tax dollars so local governmental services will have to be curtailed or all of our taxes will have to increase – a prospect that, as a retiree living on a fixed income, is not a happy one. Property values would go down and retirees like me will have even less old age security with the loss of my home equity. Businesses will have fewer customers with disposable income and this would likely result in closures. This means I will have to travel to other communities to get the goods and services that I require resulting in more time and money for me. The loss of the VA here in Hot Springs would also have a very negative impact on another valuable resource – our schools. We would not only lose educational funding but lose enrollment upon which state funding is based. Thus, we are hit with a double whammy.

These are but a few of the many negative effects the proposed closure would have on the veterans, the community, and me. Hot Springs is, and has always been, known as the Veteran’s Town where we seem to have much more caring and compassion for our men and women who have served our county well than does the VA – at least as reflected by the impending decision to close the Hot Springs local facility.

There are many flaws in the draft EIS that skews the results toward what the VA wanted in the first place. Examples include the cost comparison figures I mentioned above, the number of undercounted veterans in the catchment area, the assumption that the veterans we serve here are from Rapid City, and not, in reality from Nebraska, Wyoming and SD counties to the east. This assumption then skews the travel time and expenses required invalidating the premise that the VA wants to provide quality care close to home.

In order to better serve SD veterans and their spouses, who have different needs than the veterans the VA serves, the State of South Dakota has seen fit to invest millions of dollars in a state-of-the art facility now being built here in Hot Springs. Perhaps the VA could learn from the state of SD as to why this investment is being made.

We here in Hot Springs have prided ourselves in how we treat VA veterans for over 100 years. I hope you allow us to do the same for the next 100 years. Do not close the Hot Springs VA facility!

IB23-4

IB23-5

IB23-4: VA used the most up-to-date information available, and all Veterans groups within the BHHCS service area have been included. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volumes and services. Exhibit 1 in Chapter 1 has been updated and expanded to include more current Veteran population data.

IB23-5: IB27-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VA hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA also notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans now have more options for care (including inpatient and specialty care) from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response in and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IB24: Kimberly Beldin

Commenter IB24: Kimberly Beldin

SH

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Kimberlee Beldin

Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: Ally get esp 2.3.5 - Save the VA Proposal + 3.10 Socioeconomic

Need: to keep the Hot Springs V.A. ^{open and} a useable facility for veterans

Purpose: I relocated to Hot Springs almost 5 yrs. ago from Huron, SD. In my time here in Hot Springs I've come to this conclusion about keeping the V.A. ^{open and} operating facility. Why shut it down? That makes no sense to me! What's the pt. of having to transport the veterans who moved here or were relocated to Hot Springs for vet services to a location miles/hrs. away? For some, that's a very ^{mentally/} physically taxing trip that has the potential of costing them money they might not have. It's a whole different story if it's pd. for. Yet the bottom line is this & a very simple & logical thought - why shut down this facility when ^{it's} servicing the needs of local veterans? →

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to _____ continued

enter this information online on my behalf.

Kimberlee Beldin _____ 2/12/16

Signature Date

IB24-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VA hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans now have more options for care (including inpatient and specialty care) from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response in and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating purchased care option and quality of care.

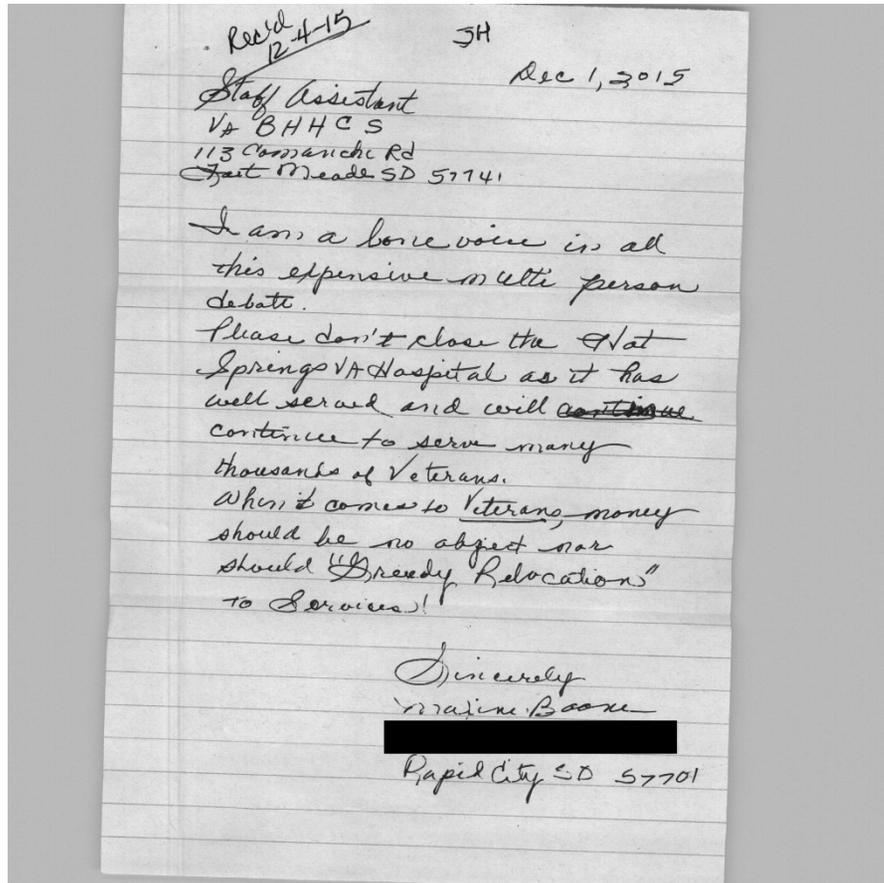
IB24-1

IB24-2: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus and allow VA to maintain a presence there. Veterans now have more options for care (including inpatient and specialty care) from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and purchased care options and quality, respectively.

IB24-2

Commenter IB25: Maxine Boone

Commenter IB25: Maxine Boone



IB25-1

IB25-1: IB27-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VA hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans now have more options for care (including inpatient and specialty care) from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response in and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IB26: Emerson Bailey

Commenter IB26: Emerson Bailey

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#52



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
Started: Wednesday, March 23, 2016 2:25:41 PM
Last Modified: Wednesday, March 23, 2016 2:29:41 PM
Time Spent: 00:04:00
IP Address: 72.8.233.77

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Emerson Bailey
Address	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Gordon
State/Province	NE
ZIP/Postal Code	69343
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Commenter IB26: Emerson Bailey

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

SAME
AS
IB18

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

Greetings to those who have decision authority on the Hot Springs campus status,

I was diagnosed with [REDACTED] in 2005 through the VA Hot Springs facility. My primary care doctor was able to spend time with me--instead of being rushed with the crushing workload experienced at other VA facilities--which literally saved my life! Suicidal thoughts and ideations were dominant in my mind, but I had no idea why or where they originated.

As an FMF (Fleet Marine Force) Hospital Corpsman, I saw and worked with the worst of the wounded Marines--both in-country and in Intensive Care Units onboard the USS Valley Forge (LPH-8) and USS Tripoli (LPH-10). We worked 16 hours every day, 7 days a week in ICU--and in-country we were "on" 24/7. I'm qualified to wear the Navy/Marine Combat Action Ribbon with FMF insignia.

The Hot Springs VA campus is a significant and positive factor in the healing process for veterans, and those of us with a 100% service-connected disability (70% for [REDACTED] plus 30% for [REDACTED] have come to depend on the folks there. They treat the vets with respect and dignity, and if the Hot Springs facility is closed we will either have to go to a non-VA care facility--where we will just be another nameless patient--or we will have to drive an even greater distance to Fort Meade or some other facility not yet built.

My round trip drive for a single VA appointment is over 200 miles to Hot Springs (from Gordon, Nebraska). Having to drive to Rapid City or Sturgis for care will be a significant increase in driving, and it will also be a significant increase in travel pay (a factor which apparently has not been given appropriate weighting in the final decision to close Hot Springs' VA campus).

I have an MBA in Management Science, and we were always taught to consider the entire scope of a project instead of focusing only on isolated details. It seems that someone--or several "someones"--have an agenda that includes building a new facility in Rapid City. To afford that construction project, they feel they must close Hot Springs VA Black Hills--a truly horrible prospect for me and many others.

A facility in Rapid City will necessarily be more inherently stressful than the Hot Springs site. Hot Springs' campus is isolated vertically from the rest of the city, and this provides a comfort zone separating us from the traffic and city noise occurring in any populated area. It is a peaceful haven with healing benefits not found at any other VA facility I've visited. An alternate site in Rapid City would not have this peaceful isolation, and we would have to deal with city traffic, noise, and associated stressors common to larger cities.

It would seem reasonable to have me go to a local hospital, but the hospital in Gordon has such a bad reputation that I will not go there (except when VA folks come down and visit the hospital). I had a close friend who was misdiagnosed at the Gordon hospital, and he died as a direct result of that misdiagnosis and resulting delay to reach a hospital (Rapid City Regional) with proper staff and facilities.

Would Rapid City Regional hospital be a fit alternative to the Hot Springs campus? In some ways "yes", but in others--like the non-stressful environment on the hill in Hot Springs--I would have to say "no." Being "just another patient" at any hospital outside of the VA system goes against the promise and commitment made to us as soldiers that we would be properly cared for when injured or in need of medical services.

Instead of closing the VA Black Hills facility in Hot Springs, South Dakota, please keep it OPEN and fully-supported with the needed staff. When my clinical psychologist retired, not only was she not replaced--except with locum tenens docs--but the super-helpful PTSD support group was simply eliminated. No more group, no more support as a group of veterans familiar with each other and willing to support each other. My present psychiatrist, although excellent in all respects, is in Baltimore, Maryland. We must communicate via television. There is nothing--in my mind--to compare to the quality of care we should receive by sitting across from a person in our same room.

Please contact me at this address with any questions you might have about my statements, and I will do my best to convince you to KEEP THE VA HOT SPRINGS FACILITY OPEN!

Thank you for considering my comments,

Emerson R Bailey, HM2 (Hospital Corpsman attached to the Marines in VietNam, 1967-1968)

Commenter IB27: Rita Behrens

Commenter IB27: Rita Behrens

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#26



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Friday, December 04, 2015 1:39:12 PM
 Last Modified: Friday, December 04, 2015 2:03:43 PM
 Time Spent: 00:24:31
 IP Address: 96.2.13.235

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Rita Behrens
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	/
City/Town	Rapid City
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57703
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via U.S. Mail at the address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

I am writing in reference to the Hot Springs SD, Veterans Hospital. Please do not close this facility. We need this hospital! Our Veterans sacrificed everything and were willing to die protecting our land and our people. Our state is mostly rural and it is important to keep this hospital open no matter what the cost. The government owes our Veterans that!!!! Listen to our voices, and hear our wishes!

IB27-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VA hospital open and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA notes that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans now have more options for care (including inpatient and specialty care) from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response in and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating purchased care option and quality of care.

IB27-1

Commenter IC1: CW Cady

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Cady W. Cutler

Address: [Redacted] Hot Springs SD 57114

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Purpose: _____

I Cady W. Cutler give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Cady W. Cutler Date 1-22-2016
Date 2016

Commenter IC1: CW Cady

To Whom it may concern

Subject: Future of VA Facility Hot Springs SD
February 1, 2016

My name is C W "Bill" Cutler. I am a semi-retired veteran of the US Navy, and left the US Navy with an "Honorable" discharge. I first became involved with the VA and their health care programs in S Texas. On occasion I have utilized the S Texas, VA medical program for 10 plus years. I found their facility excellent in providing care.

When the offer of employment was made to my wife one of the first things I did was look into the availability of VA services in the Hot Springs area. I was surprised to learn of the potential for the Hot Springs facility to be closed. Never the less we chose to make the move here to Hot Springs.

It is my understanding that the Veteran's facility has a long-long history of activity here dating back to the civil war era. After being here for approximately 3 months and getting introduced to the local VA operation I find the services offered and available are very good and also much in demand to the local citizens and patrons. I personally found the services excellent and was pleased at my first introduction and registering at the Hot Springs VA Hospital.

The consideration to close or reduce services here in Hot Springs does not seem practical to me. The buildings are in good condition and the cost of operation would appear to be minimal. Local cost of living for employees is far less than other area's in the US that I am familiar with are. IE; property costs- taxes and utilities are much lower than many areas.

It would be my recommendation that the decision makers may want to consider the expansion of this area rather than a reduction of services. For local patrons to be reassigned to another area would create additional expense to all parties. In addition closure or reduction of services could result in a devastating effect on the local community.

Sincerely

C W "Bill" Cutler
2711 US 18
Hot Springs, SD 57747



IC1-1: Thank your comment. VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that there is a need for change in the health services configuration, as described in the EIS, and that the proposed reconfiguration would better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

IC1-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC1-3: Sections 4.10 and 4.16 of the Final EIS have been revised to address potential impacts to the local economy (project-specific and cumulative). See also related group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E.

IC1-1

IC1-2

IC1-3

Commenter IC2: Brad Calhoon

Commenter IC2: Brad Calhoon

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Brad Calhoon
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.6

Need: The Hot Springs VA has ³⁵⁷ ~~400~~ people/employees and serves hundreds of veterans. If we lose the Hot Springs VA this will have a negative impact on my business and already has. A long time ago started to affect my business.

Ago

Purpose: 2.3.5 Alternative E SAVE The VA Proposal

I Brad Calhoon give permission/authorization for Seach Peterson to enter this information online on my behalf.

B. Calhoon Signature 1/2/16 Date

IC2-1: Sections 4.10 and 4.16 of the Final EIS have been revised to address potential impacts to the local economy (project-specific and cumulative). See also related group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E.

With respect to current VA employees, VA has also committed to implementing measures (e.g., retraining) to ensure that no VA employee would lose their job, as described in Section 4.10 of the final EIS.

IC2-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC2-1

IC2-2

Commenter IC3: Paula Cape

Commenter IC3: Paula Cape

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Paula Cape

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: Veterans from MT, NE + WY come to the Hot Springs VA because of the quality of care is preferred over the care they can receive in their own state. Veterans already travel 500 mi ^{each way} because it is the closest VAMC to them. BHHVA is the largest employer in the area. Loss of the VAMC will result in decrease population which will lead to decreased tax base, increased taxes, other businesses

IC3-1

Purpose: closing + inability for some businesses to keep employees or to pay them their existing wages. Prices will go up. Families of veterans who have moved here to be close to care may have to move again if the VA closes. Services in the area will be decreased. Our schools and roads will be impacted w/ decrease of federal matching funds.

I, Paula Cape give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Paula Cape 1-22-16
Signature Date

Nancy Gregory

IC3-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs.

VA notes that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area, which should also help address potential economic concerns.

Commenter IC4: Mike Chaudhari

Mike Chaudhari
 Motel 6
 [REDACTED]
 Hot Springs, SD 57747
 January 22, 2016

Veterans Administration
 Comments to Environmental Impact
 Statement (EIS) for the Hot Springs, SD
 Veterans Hospital

3.10 Socioeconomic Impacts

Dear Sirs: Re: 1.2.2.2.1 Locations of Veteran Populations; 1.2.2.2.2 Distance Veterans Must
 Travel For Care 3.11.2.1.1 Community Services Hot Springs and Fall River City

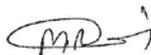
I am the owner of the Motel 6 in Hot Springs and receive about \$35,000 per year in motel
 revenues from Veterans and their families staying at the hotel while receiving medical care at the
 Hot Springs, SD facilities. I am a large taxpayer in the City of Hot Springs, Fall River County,
 and the Hot Springs School District. I also pay a \$ 2.00 occupancy fee for each room rented to
 the City of Hot Springs.

I object to the closing of the VA Hospital and also to the paring down of services and doctors
 currently going on at the facility. Closing this hospital will be damaging to my business and
 adversely affect the general tax base. Without the income from the hospital and related income
 from people living here that are associated with the VA Hospital, both employees and patients,
 the town and county will suffer greatly. Remaining taxpayers will have to pay more taxes to
 cover the lost tax base.

Currently many veterans from Nebraska, Wyoming, and eastern South Dakota stay at my hotel
 while they are being treated here. **Once the hospital is closed these customers will be lost to
 me.**

My preferred option is 2.3.5 Save the VA Proposal.

cc. Senator John Thune
 Senator Mike Rounds
 Representative Christi Noem


 Sincerely yours,

Mike Chaudhari
 Motel 6, Hot Springs, SD

IC4-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs.

VA notes that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area, which should also help address potential economic concerns.

IC4-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC4-1

IC4-2

Commenter IC5: Mark Clarke

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mark Clarke

Address: [Redacted]

Augusta St 30507

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: Health Care

Purpose: _____

I Mark Clarke give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Mark Clarke 4-23-16
Signature Date

IC5-1: Thank you for your comment. VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that there is a need for change in the health services configuration, as described in the EIS, and that the proposed reconfiguration would better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans

IC5-1

Commenter IC6: Rita Clarke

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Rita Clarke

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: Veterans entered the service of our country with promise of health care for the remainder of their lives. A smaller community is a better environment for recovering vets.

Purpose: Safety is paramount and Hot Springs is very safe. People thrive in safe atmosphere.

I, Rita Clarke give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Rita Clarke Signature Date 4-23-16

IC6-1: VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that there is a need for change in the health services configuration, as described in the EIS, and that the proposed reconfiguration would better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. This includes continuation of primary care services in Hot Springs (on the existing campus under preferred alternative A-2).

IC6-1

Commenter IC7: Gerald Collogan

VABLACKHILLS EIS

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: GERALD COLLOGAN

Address: [REDACTED]

HOT SPRINGS, S.D. 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Purpose: _____

I GERALD COLLOGAN give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Gerald Collogan _____ 5-3-2016
Signature Date

SEE ATTACHED

Commenter IC7: Gerald Collogan

Environmental Impact Statement

Gerald Collogan

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Release information to Congressional yes

I'm a second generation civil servant, working with and for veterans. My father was a WWII vet and received national recognition for therapy ideas while working with veterans at the Hot Springs VA. My parents met at this VA and later were married.

Our community benefited greatly from the VA through the veteran patients and VA employees. Employees contributed to our city government and its decisions, held positions of responsibility in our churches as well as community service groups. Even domiciliary patients helped as merit badge councilors in our scout troops and employees as troop leaders helping to keep a strong youth group thriving.

As medical library technician I watched our PTSD program become stronger and more successful with therapy for the veterans. The program's staff is very focused on purpose and our community environment lends itself with the therapy. Patients in the program say they learned a lot while in the Hot Springs program.

The present employees are fewer because of cuts but are still passing inspections. They are under a lot of stress and are still keeping up the quality of taking care of our veterans.

C7-1

C7-1: Thank for your comment. We are proud of the history of service the Hot Springs VAMC has provided to our Veterans and will continue to provide quality care under the proposed reconfiguration. Under the new preferred alternative A-2, VA will continue to provide outpatient primary care services and maintain a presence on the existing campus.

Commenter IC8: Lane Connelly

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Lane Connelly

Address: [Redacted]

South Dakota 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10-2.3

Need: I think if they close the VA people will lose there jobs, and more or try to find a new one that was good paying job. And people will lose there homes, if they shut down th VA.

Purpose: 2.3.5 Alternative E save the VA proposal

I Lane Connelly give permission/authorization for Sarah Peterson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Lane Connelly Date: 2/2/16

IC8-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs.

IC8-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC8-1

IC8-2

Commenter IC9: George Corrigan

IC9-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: GEORGE CORRIGAN - USN
 Address: Hot Springs SD - 57747
 Phone: _____
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.3.5 ALTE - SAVE VA proposal

Need: Bring the Vet Hospital back on track. The VA used to be the best - I've been to the VA on the East Coast is very very bad. Here people really care as to being a Vet and ^{LACK} a person. We're under staffed and under clinics.

Purpose: This the Vets Town we take great pride in what we do and what the people to VA do for us.

Keep our Dr's Nurses & staff here. This VA has changed so much for the worse. Although still trying hard to keep us. We need help

IC9-1

I George Corrigan give permission/authorization for Release Info to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: George Corrigan Date: 1-28-16

Commenter IC9: George Corrigan

Addition Comment: I can't say thank you enough to our Doctors Nurses and all staff. If this VA is closed it will be a loss to us Vets, cause alot of hardship. The feeling of loss will greatly add to our PTSD, our handi capped and recovery patients, our Native Peoples who cannot travel to the City. This is a spiritual place with lodges and family. We are all a family here. The VA here has helped me with so much and many medical problems. This is an ~~embarrassment~~ embarrassment our state our town and most of all our VA! More politics and red tape selling us out to the lowest bidder. It feel like we're coming home for Vietnam. We WILL NOT GIVE UP. This is not what this country was founded upon. Remember the Revolution. 1776

George Corrigan 1-29-16
 Signature Date

Don't tread on Me.

IC9-2

IC9-3

IC9-2: : VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the needs of today's Veterans as well as the needs of those in the future. Under all alternatives, Veterans would have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IC9-3: Under the new preferred alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. See also group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

Commenter IC10: Franklyn Craft

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: FRANKLYN H. CRAFT
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs S.D. 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2 Assistance must travel for care

Need: I MOVED TO HOT SPRINGS APPROX 5 YEARS AGO FROM GERING NE. GERING IS ABOUT 150 MILES SOUTH OF HERE. THIS SAVED ME MANY MILES AS I WAS COMING TO HOT SPRINGS VA FOR MEDICAL NEEDS.

NOW IF THEY CLOSE THE V.A. CENTER HERE I WILL BE BACK TO TRAVELLING AGAIN.

Purpose: I AM HOPING THEY WILL AT LEAST KEEP THE V.A. OPEN AS AN OUT BASED PATIENT UNIT. KEEPING THE LAB, PHARMACY AND NURSES AND D.A.'S TO GIVE PHYSICANS

2.3.5 Alternative E Save the VA Proposal

I FRANKLYN H. CRAFT give permission/authorization for Sarah Peter to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date _____

IC10-1: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

IC10-2: Yes, Under the new preferred alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus

IC10-3: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC10-1

IC10-2

IC10-3

Commenter IC11: Nancy Cuckler

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Nancy Cuckler
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs, S.D. 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.21

Need: My husband and I retired to Hot Springs because this VA facility was here. The town of Hot Springs will slowly die because it is our main employer.

Purpose: I choose alternative 2.3.5. Save the VA proposal to service our veterans and our town of Hot Springs

I Nancy B. Cuckler give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Nancy B. Cuckler Date 1-30-16

IC11-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. See group response in Table E-2 relating to socioeconomic impacts. VA also notes that VHA is proposing to place a national call center into Buildings 3 and 4 of the existing campus which would bring an additional 120 jobs to the area. Though this call center is not related to the proposed reconfiguration of healthcare services, it is an example of the types of adaptive reuses available for the Hot Springs VAMC under Alternative G.

IC11-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC11-1

IC11-2

Commenter IC11: Nancy Cuckler

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Nancy Cuckler
Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, S.D. 57747
Phone: [Redacted]
e-mail:

Release Information to the Congressional X Yes No

Section: 1.22.2.1

Need: My brother was in Vietnam, exposed to [Redacted]. He went to numerous VA's in the United States for medical help. The best help he received anywhere was from the VA in Hot Springs. He was not from Pennington County or even the state of South Dakota.

Purpose: The Hot Springs VA is for all Veterans from everywhere. They come here for the best medical care. I want alternative 2.3.3- Save the VA proposal to serve all Veterans everywhere

I Nancy Cuckler give permission/authorization for [Redacted] to enter this information online on my behalf.

Nancy S. Cuckler 1-30-16
Signature Date

IC11-3: VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

IC11-3

IC11-2

Commenter IC12: Keaton Cummings

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Keaton Cummings
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2.2 Distance Veterans must Travel for Care

Need: I work at the SD Veterans Home in Hot Springs, SD and I see the negative impact of the VA BHHCS being closed on a daily basis. Directly from the veterans, I hear & see the burden that this places on our veterans, our facility, and the community.

2.3.5 Alternative E-Save the VA proposal.
 Purpose: Save the VA plan alternative.

I ~~strongly~~ wish to hope the veterans always receive the ~~best~~ best care available, which they undoubtedly deserve! And I know, closing the VA BHHCS at Hot Springs campus will diminish this quality and availability of services to our veterans!

Please keep the Hot Springs VA campus open, as I speak for the nearly 100+ veterans @ the SD Veterans Home whom some are too disabled or unwilling to speak themselves and they have echoed the same thoughts listed above.

I Keaton Cummings give permission/authorization for Sarah Petersen to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Keaton Cummings Date: February 2, 2016

IC12-1: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance Veterans must travel.

IC12-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC12-3: VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that there is a need for change in the health services configuration, as described in the EIS, and that the proposed reconfiguration would better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

IC12-1

IC12-2

IC12-3

Commenter IC13: Megan Cummings

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Megan Cummings

Address: [Redacted] Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.1D.2.6 VA BHHCS Employment

Need: The closing of the Hot Springs VA will negatively affect my family and my ability to provide for them. Although I will continue to be employed by the VA, there is no guarantee that I will be able to stay in Hot Springs where my family is well established. Money will be difficult as my husband is also well established in his occupation and my child is well established in her education. If I am offered the opportunity to commute, this will force me to sacrifice time with my family and jeopardize my safety traveling. Selling out home will also be difficult as few people are looking to move to the area as the closing of the VA reduces many employment opportunities.

Purpose: 2.3.5 Alternate E - Save the VA proposal

The closing of the Hot Springs VA will also negatively affect the Veterans who will be forced to travel great distances to receive care.

I, Megan Cummings give permission/authorization for Sarah Peterson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Megan Cummings Date: 2/2/16

IC13-1 VA appreciates and values your service, work and devotion to your job at the Hot Springs VAMC. VA is committed to implementing measures (e.g., retraining) to ensure that no VA employee would lose their employment.

IC13-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IC13-1

IC13-3: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distances Veterans must travel.

IC13-2

IC13-3

Commenter IC14: Terry Cates

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, January 26, 2016 3:25 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] EIS

From: Terry Cates [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, January 21, 2016 6:09 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] EIS

I would like to make my comments on the VA's proposal to shut down the Hot Springs VA. My first concern is to the City of Hot Springs, the tax loss will effect more than just the people of Hot Springs. First with the tax loss we will loose Police protections as the City will no longer be able to afford to have a Police Dept. Even if they contract with the Sheriff's Dept they will no be able to afford to have as many officers on duty as they do now. Also the Fire Dept will suffer as the City has budgeted money to help fund this department. We currently hold a ISO rating that effects are home owners insurance. Again the city will not be able to afford a budget to assist the fire dept, they will no longer be able to hold the ISO rating so everyone's insurance will go up, most will no longer be able to afford the insurance and will have to drop it. Every business will suffer with the loss of the VA, current employee's spend a lot of money in the town, with the loss of the employee's that money will no longer be spent here. Other business's in the Hills will also suffer as those same employee's will not have the money to buy new vehicle's and other items currently spent in western South Dakota.

Last is for myself, a disabled veteran who currrently uses this VA for all my health care needs. With the way things have been shuttled to Ft Meade lately, when I have an appointment I have to take a day off from work to go 90 miles one way, spend too much time there as everyone else is having to go over there and then drive another 90 miles home. As a VA employee this is not cost effective and there is no way to justify this to me. Shutting this VA down is just stupid and benefits no one except the people trying to do it so they can look good to their bosses.

Thank you
 Terry Cates
 Hot Springs SD
 [REDACTED]

IC14-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs, although impacts on individual insurance rates are beyond the scope of the EIS to address. VA notes that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area, which should also help address potential economic concerns.

IC14-1
 See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts.

IC14-2: Under all alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and purchased care options and quality of care.

IC14-2

Commenter IC15: Beth Cook

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 16, 2015 11:29 AM

Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Feedback

From: Beth Cook [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, November 08, 2015 2:20 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Feedback

To Whom It May Concern:

I'm writing you regards of the closure of the Hot Springs VA in Hot Springs South Dakota. I participated in the EIS and gave feedback and now I am giving feedback to the draft of the EIS that was just released.

The VA has many struggles and has been showcased in a dark light in the media in the past year and rightfully so. I am not only a resident of Hot Springs South Dakota but I am also a spouse of veteran. My husband is a veteran of OIF and OEF and suffers from PTSD. The VA in Hot Springs has been the most helpful in his situation.

The VA has been much more than just a building but has been the primary care giver to the veterans that live in this town and veterans from the Reservation, Western Nebraska, and Wyoming. Hot Springs has always been a veteran's town. The residents of Hot Springs are compassionate and understanding of veterans that live in our community and who are also receiving treatment in the various programs at The VA.

The VA in Hot Springs proposed closure will not solve the VA's issues, which go far beyond the closure of one hospital in a small town. There are many issues such as cutting programs, not having enough staff, long wait times just to see a provider, waiting weeks for approval for education programs. These problems stem from a culture that has developed within the VA system.

People have forgotten the sole reason why the VA's exist, the veterans. I have read stories about veterans taking their own lives because of not receiving fast enough treatment for their PTSD or being ignored. They are given pills to take with no follow-up, my husband was almost a casualty of this disease and struggles with this every day. I live in horror that one day his disease will prevail.

IC15-1: VA intends to play a continued role in the Hot Springs community and do all we can to keep it a Veterans town. VA notes that the new preferred alternative A-2 includes a continued presence on the VA campus through operation of a new CBOC in renovated Building 12. A VA national call center is also now proposed for Buildings 3 and 4 on campus. While not related to the proposed reconfiguration of healthcare services, it is an example of the types of adaptive reuses available for the Hot Springs VAMC under Alternative G.

IC15-2: VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. Under all alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IC15-1

IC15-2

Commenter IC15: Beth Cook	
<p>I would like you to walk in his shoes and many other veterans that suffer from this disease and many other health issues that claim their lives.</p> <p>Is it too much to ask to take care of the ones that gave their lives to our beloved Country without question? They sacrificed their health and emotional well-being and some gave the ultimate sacrifice by giving their life. Why is this so hard to understand that they deserve the best quality of care that we can give without question?</p> <p>The VA in Hot Springs gives great care to its veterans that they serve but over time the VA system has cut services piece by piece. So not all services have been available and then veterans have had to travel which some are unable to do especially great distances whether it be from health issues or financial. So why make it harder for the veterans in this area and the surrounding area even harder.</p> <p>I would like you take a good hard look at what the real issue is and analyze all the facts. The VA of Hot Springs is essential to the well-being of veterans in the area and the surrounding areas.</p> <p>Please take in consideration the effect that you will have on the veterans that live in Hot Springs and that live in the surrounding areas. Also consider the effect that you will have on the community of Hot Springs that has embraced the VA and the veterans that is serves.</p> <p>Respectfully, BC</p>	<p>IC15-3: Under the new preferred Alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled, purchased care option and quality of care.</p> <p>IC15-4: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs.</p>

Commenter IC16: Alan Connell

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#27



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
Started: Monday, December 07, 2015 10:56:13 AM
Last Modified: Monday, December 07, 2015 3:14:44 PM
Time Spent: 04:18:30
IP Address: 75.170.116.240

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Alan Connell
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	none
City/Town	Crawford
State/Province	NE
ZIP/Postal Code	69339
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Commenter IC16: Alan Connell

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

As a CVSO I feel that it is wrong to move any part of the Hot Springs Black Hills Health Care System to Rapid City SD. for the reasons below.
 #1 It makes a long day and is very hard on the Older Veterans when being taken to Ft Meade SD. or Rapid City SD. for medical appointments . We have a VA Van and take Veterans to these appointments every week and we see how this effects the older Veterans a lot of the time.
 #2 The total cost for the Veterans Travel Pay will increase a lot for the VA in 30 years and I also did not see any mention of this in the EIS report. Also there are a lot of Veterans that do not collect Travel pay that cannot afford the extra expense of going on past Hot Springs SD. from the Nebraska Panhandle for a Medical Appointments. We are seeing some of the Veterans who have Medicare starting to go to Private Care because of the losses of the Services that already have occurred at the VA in Hot Springs SD. I believe that a Veteran has the right to go to the VA if They choose and not let the longer distant and the expense of travel make the choice for them.
 #3 Dawes County NE. has a Van that we transport Veterans in. It is already a great expense to this County. I can see that in the future the need for another Van and another Driver, if a lot more Services were taken away from the Hot Springs VA and we will have to transport Veterans further from our County, it will make a huge difference in our County Budget. I don't believe that the Dawes County tax payers will stand for it.
 #4 I also do not believe that the Dollar figures that was used in the EIS report are current and up to date. Also the Veteran numbers used in the report are incorrect by previous numbers I have seen. The VA has made the numbers of Veterans seen for Medical Appointments at the Hot Springs VA smaller because so many Services have already been taken away from the Clinic and Hospital.
 #5 The Veterans in the Vets Home in Hot Springs should have the Clinic and Hospital there in Hot Springs SD. for their Medical needs. Why would the VA want to take the Medical Care away from the Vets Home and not give the Vets a choice on what Medical Care they wants to receive. By law , a Veteran can go wherever they want for Medical Care. Combine the two. It would also save VA money by serving the Veterans in the Vets Home, along with the other Veterans that would go there just like the present time and past years.

IC16-1
 IC16-2
 IC16-3
 IC16-4
 IC16-5

IC16-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC fully operational. Under the new preferred Alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Under all of the alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live (with reduced out-of-pocket expenses). See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively. VA BHHCS's current transportation system also would continue under all of the alternatives. In addition, revised Section 1.2.2.3 provides additional rationale for the proposed RRTP relocation to Rapid City.

IC16-2 and IC16-3: See related response above regarding travel cost and transportation assistance.

IC16-4: VA used the most up-to-date information available. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volumes and services. Exhibit 1 in Chapter 1 has been updated and expanded to include more current Veteran population data. Regarding the cost of alternatives, see related group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E. Section 2.3 of the Final EIS includes an additional breakout and explanation of costs for each alternative. VA believes the estimates to be representative of costs at the time the original estimates were developed and also that costs are consistently developed across all the alternatives. However, VA is unable to further update the cost information provided in the EIS due to current appropriation restrictions.

IC16-5: VA currently partners with the South Dakota State Veterans home to the extent possible. Changes are not expected in that partnership under any of the alternatives.

Commenter ID1: Norma Daniels

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Norma Daniels

Address: _____

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: Economic Impact
Historical Loss

Purpose: I was born in Hot Springs, I remember when
it was a very busy place. It's a shame
it's closing - I think the government is a bunch
of idiots

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to
 enter this information online on my behalf.

Norma P. Daniels Signature Date April 14th 2016

ID1-1: VA recognizes the potential for adverse impacts on the local economy. See related group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E. The discussions of economic impact (Sections 4.10 and 4.16) have been expanded in the Final EIS to better address public concerns.

ID1-1
 ID1-2

ID1-2: With respect to historical loss, all of the alternatives under consideration have the potential to adversely affect historic properties, including the Battle Mountain Sanitarium National Historic Landmark. The measures to resolve adverse effects have identified methods to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate the effects. None of the effects are anticipated to necessitate delisting of the Battle Mountain Sanitarium as a National Historic Landmark. See also related group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E, and revised discussions in Sections 4.3 and 5.2 relating to historic impacts and mitigation measures.

ID1-3

ID1-3: VA notes that under the new preferred Alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus and VA will continue to maintain a presence on the campus.

Commenter ID2: Leanne DeRouchev

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Leanne DeRouchev

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Purpose: I agree that the Veteran's

Affairs should stay in Hot Springs
and serve our Veterans of this
great nation. As the wife a veteran
my husband uses the V.A. for medical
care annually and the impact of
Closing the Hot Springs, South Dakota
VA would be a negative impact on
this community. The community
would lose valuable job, health care,
and ~~more~~ moral that keeps our
area vital.

I Leanne DeRouchev give permission/authorization for my to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Leanne DeRouchev Date April 23, 2016

ID2-1: VA acknowledges your support VA's continued presence in Hot Springs and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

ID2-1

Commenter ID3: Sheila DeVries

Commenter ID3: Sheila DeVries

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Sheila DeVries
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 4.11.2.2.4 and 4.11.6.2.4

Need: Our church family always welcomed the veterans from the Domiciliary into our church, and many attended over the years. Participating in worship and other activities helped the veterans in their healing. The congregation was blessed by having the veterans in our presence and supported all veterans in prayer.
It's vital for the veterans to be included in

Purpose: Church or other outside activities in addition to the structured VA programs. Alternative E allows the veterans to stay in a community that really cares about them. A large city will probably not embrace the veterans in the many ways that "Hot Springs, "The Veterans Town" does.

ID3-1

I Sheila DeVries give permission/authorization for H.S. Chamber/Justin Gansman enter this information online on my behalf.

Sheila DeVries Jan. 24, 2016
 Signature Date

ID3-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter ID4: Mary Duennerman

Commenter ID4: Mary Duennerman

May 4, 2016

TO: The Veterans Administration

FROM: **Mary Ellen Duennermann**
 Hot Springs, South Dakota 57747

RE: Proposed closure of the Veteran's facility in Hot Springs, SD

I add my voice to those of many others to protest the proposed closure of the Veterans' Administration facility in Hot Springs, SD. Such closure would impact the health and well-being of thousands of veterans who have plainly and eloquently voiced their desire for treatment of their physical and mental wounds in this convenient (travel-wise) and empathetic (we LIKE our veterans) location. As a returned native (after an absence of 64 years) I can personally testify to the attractions of Hot Springs).

Most of us have not gone off to face the dangers and privations of combat, nor the possibilities of personal physical or mental destruction. Don't we owe it to those who have gone in our behalf, and who have paid the price of physical and mental health, to give them the best of care in a convenient location of their choice? Must they commute hundreds of miles to a location of the Veterans Administration's choice, all the while at a greatly increased cost to the taxpayer?

In the past, we have been the envy of the world, as our nation has gone through trials and tribulations of many kinds and varieties. But always, the will of the people, of the common citizens, has prevailed. Has that ceased?



ID4-1

ID4-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC fully operational and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA also notes that under the new preferred alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus and VA would maintain a continued presence there.

Commenter ID4: Mary Duennerman

DUPLICATE OF LETTER ABOVE

May 4, 2016

TO: The Veterans Administration
FROM: Mary Ellen Duennermann
Hot Springs, South Dakota 57747
RE: Proposed closure of the Veteran's facility in Hot Springs, SD

I add my voice to those of many others to protest the proposed closure of the Veterans' Administration facility in Hot Springs, SD. Such closure would impact the health and well-being of thousands of veterans who have plainly and eloquently voiced their desire for treatment of their physical and mental wounds in this convenient (travel-wise) and empathetic (we LIKE our veterans) location. As a returned native (after an absence of 64 years) I can personally testify to the attractions of Hot Springs).

Most of us have not gone off to face the dangers and privations of combat, nor the possibilities of personal physical or mental destruction. Don't we owe it to those who have gone in our behalf, and who have paid the price of physical and mental health, to give them the best of care in a convenient location of their choice? Must they commute hundreds of miles to a location of the Veterans Administration's choice, all the while at a greatly increased cost to the taxpayer?

In the past, we have been the envy of the world, as our nation has gone through trials and tribulations of many kinds and varieties. But always, the will of the people, of the common citizens, has prevailed. Has that ceased?



Commenter ID5: Demetrius Duncan

Commenter ID5: Demetrius Duncan

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: DEMETRIUS DUNCAN

Address: [REDACTED] HOT SPRINGS
S.D. 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1, 2, 2.2.2 Distance Veterans must travel

Need: I need to see a provider at the VA in Hot Springs 8 times a year. I have lived in Hot Springs since 2008 & need physical a [REDACTED] I needed physical therapy & was in inpatient.

Purpose: now I will have to drive to Rapid City if the VA closes in Hot Springs.

ID5-1

2.3.5 Alternative E - Save the VA Proposal I want the VA to stay here.

ID5-2

I, Demetrius Duncan give permission/authorization for Saman Peters enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Demetrius Duncan Date: 1-12-16

ID5-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group response Sections E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

ID5-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter ID5: Demetrius Duncan

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: DEMETRIUS DUNCAN

Address: [REDACTED] HOT SPRINGS

S.D. 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.6 VA employment

Need: This states there will be 357 FTE's. They are well paid, this will affect the economy in many ways. After the VA employees leave, many people will leave because the VA money will leave, Hot Springs need the support of VA employees. Business will close.

Purpose: The VA in Hot Springs is the largest employer.

2.3.5
I want Alternative E - Save the VA proposal

I, DEMETRIUS DUNCAN give permission/authorization for Saran Polk to enter this information online on my behalf.

Demetrius Duncan Signature 1-12-16 Date

ID5-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs.

VA also notes that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area, which should also help address potential economic concerns.

ID5-1

ID5-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS

ID5-2

Commenter ID5: Demetrius Duncan

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: DEMETRIUS DUNCAN

Address: [REDACTED] HOT SPRINGS
S.D. 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.3 Housing

Need: I went to treatment here 2008, when I got out of treatment I went to NAU in Rapid & have 3 more classes left in ^{my} Business administration. I prepare a light + stop light town. I will not move to Rapid City to be close to the V.A if it moves

ID5-3

Purpose: I like it here and I dont want the VA to close.

2.3.5 ALTERNATIVE E - Save the VA Proposal

ID5-2

I DEMETRIUS DUNCAN give permission/authorization for Saran Polk enter this information online on my behalf.

Demetrius Duncan 1-12-16
Signature Date

ID5-3: Under the new preferred Alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

Commenter ID6: Don DeVries

Commenter ID6: Don DeVries

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Thursday, February 4, 2016 10:38 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Response to EIS for Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System
Attachments: De Vries EIS Response.doc; De Vries EIS Response.odt

From: Don-Sheila De Vries [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 03, 2016 9:44 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to EIS for Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System

Attached is my response (and comments) on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement regarding the reconfiguration of the Black Hills Health Care System.

If you have any problem opening the file, please let me know. I have attached the same file in two formats.

Don De Vries
Hot Springs

Commenter ID6: Don DeVries

Don DeVries

EIS comments
 Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System
 February 3, 2016

I am commenting on several concerns regarding this draft EIS. Below, I have addressed major issues separately to make it easier for the reader to assess these topics. But first, a few areas that bother me when I examine the draft EIS.

One of my concerns not listed below is what seems to me to be a lack of following what the NEPA and NHPA Handbook for Integrating NEPA and Section 106 says. The Handbook states: "NEPA and NHPA require Federal officials to 'stop, look, and listen' before making decisions that impact historic properties and the human environment." There are many hundreds and possibly thousands of comments submitted from the public and veterans asking and begging to continue and expand the veteran healthcare in the Hot Springs VA. It appears no one has been listening. Over 25 times in the Handbook it emphasizes the importance of seeking public comments, public participation, and/or public involvement. The Handbook states: "Agencies are required to make the draft EIS available for public review, invite comments, and respond to any comments submitted." In the spirit of the EIS process, I think many of the comments already submitted must be carefully considered. The Handbook also states: "The ultimate goal for both NEPA environmental reviews and Section 106 is to ensure the Federal Government considers the effects of its actions upon the environment, acts in the public interest, works efficiently, and makes decisions in an open, efficient, and transparent manner." Please do not forget to act in the public interest, which has been clearly identified in the numerous comments already submitted to the VA through the EIS process.

The draft EIS states: "Reasonable alternatives include those that are practical or feasible from a technical and economic standpoint and using common sense, rather than simply desirable." Keep common sense a factor in the final alternative, not just the desirable alternative, which appears to be the case in the draft EIS, regarding the VA's preferred Alternative A. It was a breath of fresh air when at the NEPA meeting in Hot Springs on Jan. 21, 2016 it was said that this is not money driven, it is for veteran care.

I had [redacted] in September, and now, after 4 months using a knee scooter, and crutches, I can emphatically say I would rather use the ramps that may be a bit too steep in the existing VA facility in Hot Springs than stairs. I have struggled over the past several months going up and down stairs, and know I would want ramps as an option in an emergency, rather than just stairs. I do not know, but I would bet when Senator Tim Johnson visited the Hot Springs VA facility, he could manage the ramps in his motorized wheel chair, and in an emergency would prefer these (although steep) ramps to being carried down stairs. I have looked at the ramps, and know for myself, I would feel much safer using ramps than being carried up or down a stairway.

Issue #1. When I reviewed the Handbook mentioned above, a couple of parts stood out to me. Although the handbook states "... federal agencies must comply with the procedural requirements of NEPA before they make final decisions about major federal actions that could have effects on the human environment.", it appears in the EIS little emphasis was given to the human environment and the effects of virtually closing the Hot Springs VA. The effects would be huge to the community, and the analysis of the effect of losing the number of full time positions in the preferred alternative A (estimated 290 in Table 4.10-2) is far more severe than presented in the draft EIS.

ID6-1

ID6-1: Appendix E contains all comments submitted throughout the process. All comments have been read and taken into consideration when drafting the Final EIS. Parts of the Final EIS have been revised in response to public comment, and VA has selected a new preferred alternative, A-2, that includes operation of an updated CBOC for primary care services on the existing campus. The public comments also will be taken into consideration by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs when making a final decision.

ID6-2

ID6-2: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs. See also group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the analysis of potential socioeconomic impacts and potential cumulative impacts on the local community in the Final EIS.

VA notes that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area, which should also help address potential economic concerns. Though this call center is not related to the proposed reconfiguration of healthcare services, it is an example of the types of adaptive reuses available for the Hot Springs campus in the event a decision is made to vacate the campus.

VA also thanks you for providing the additional information from the Hot Springs Building Inspector Scott Simianer. This information is also being included as part of the public record.

Commenter ID6: Don DeVries

ID6-2

The estimated total annual wage loss of the 290 positions, of which 216 are estimated to be in Fall River County, is huge. Of these positions, the draft EIS estimated annual wage loss would be \$65,939 multiplied by 216 positions, for a total of almost \$14,243,000. This is definitely not moderate or minor as stated in the EIS: "The reduction in VA wages would be moderate when compared to total wages earned in Fall River County and minor when retirement-eligible FTEEs and wages are included (see Section 4.10.2.2.1)."

Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the total number of employees in Fall River County in the second quarter of 2014 was 2587. The weekly average wage of these employees was \$581. Total weekly wages paid (2587 X \$581) in the county would have been \$1,503,047. By removing weekly pay of 216 potentially eliminated VA positions at the weekly wage of \$1268, (216 X \$1268 = \$273,888), wages paid would have been \$1,229,159. This is a decrease of 18.22% of the total wages paid in the county. (\$1,503,047 - \$1,229,159 = \$273,888, and \$273,888 / \$1,503,047 = 18.22%). The majority of these wages would affect the City of Hot Springs instead of the county, so the effect of reduced wages for Hot Springs could easily be 30% or more, since almost 50% of the population of Fall River is in the city of Hot Springs. It is absolutely absurd to report that the reduction in wages would be moderate, and minor by including retirement-eligible FTEEs. Retirement eligible FTEEs who actually retire are still wages lost, so these wages must be considered. I have not even accounted for the unknown other non VA jobs that would be lost if the VA employment is drastically reduced.

It is apparent to me the continual non-hiring of staff in Hot Springs has caused the problem of having so many people eligible for retirement in the near future. The draft EIS supports this thinking, when it says: "Assuming the same distribution of FTEEs by county of residence, 116 of the 168 retirement-eligible FTEEs could reside in Fall River County. Thus, more than half of the FTEE reduction (116 of 216) could occur through retirement, ..." I contend the high number of soon-to-be retirees proves the VA has not replaced the needed employees for years, and the average employee age continues to climb. Employees who left for whatever reason should have been replaced to provide healthcare services for veterans. It is no wonder the Hot Springs facility serves fewer veterans than it has historically. I don't possibly have time during the comment period to compare the ages and number of soon-to-be retirement eligible personnel between the Hot Springs and the Fort Meade facilities. Is over half of the Ft. Meade staff eligible for retirement by the end of the year 2020? Similar facilities should have similar employee demographics.

When I reviewed the comments already received and available at the Hot Springs VA Director's office, I was surprised at the number of veterans who say they moved here because of healthcare at the VA. With the Alternative A EIS option, I can't imagine how many additional people would choose to leave Hot Springs. I have not seen any facts or statistics in the draft EIS regarding veterans and families that would move away, but this certainly should have been addressed. I would venture to guess we would see a reduction of another 500 to 800 people in the Hot Springs area. This should be addressed in the EIS process, with the human environment and economic impact. The veteran to non-veteran population in Hot Springs is much higher than average. With a major reduction in the healthcare for veterans, the veteran population will leave, to be closer to healthcare. I also saw in the comments at the Director's office a statement from the Hot Springs Boys and Girls Club. The comment said 30 of 55 kids have been forced to move because of this potential (VA) closing. The reduction of staff has already made a negative impact on the community.

When I reviewed the comments already received, I did not see any information sent by the Hot Springs Building Inspector Scott Simianer, in a letter dated November 17, 2014. His testimony addressed the Historic District, the Hot Springs Historic Preservation Commission, and economic concerns. If his testimony is not available for the EIS process for any reason, please let me know, I will furnish you with his letter and comments. I have not included his entire letter below, but regarding the subject I am addressing here, following are four paragraphs in their entirety:

Commenter ID6: Don DeVries

My office issues the building permits for all new construction in the city. What many people don't realize is that the local building department is used as a barometer to measure the local economic climate through building trends. When the economy is strong and healthy there is growth, when the local economy is weak there is less construction activity, and if there is a threat to the town's future, either real or perceived, that too is reflected in the building permit statistics.

The City's building permits statistics are entered into a spreadsheet throughout each calendar year and are reported annually to the U.S. Census Bureau and the South Dakota Department of Revenue. That reported information is then reflected in the demographics that individuals and businesses use when looking to locate or expand into an area. My office also receives anywhere from two to four direct requests for my building permit information each year. These are individuals or corporations that are looking at Hot Springs with an interest in locating here. They are looking at our local economic barometer, and the looming uncertainty of the presence of the VA is reflected in those numbers.

I enter the annual building permit statistics onto another spreadsheet that reflects the building trends in Hot Springs since 2004. That spreadsheet reflects just how the December 12, 2011 announcement regarding the closing of the Hot Springs VA facility negatively impacted the local economy. The 2012 construction season was essentially non-existent, there was no new residential construction in Hot Springs for the first time in recent memory, and the overall project valuations for the year were \$2,998,000.00 below the previous three year average. THAT is significant.

Prior to the announcement I was working with a doctor who had located to Hot Springs after accepting a position at the VA hospital. He and his wife, along with their children, bought a lot out at the golf course and after about six weeks of communications with him and his contractor he was ready to submit his construction plans for his new house. After the announcement I never heard from him again. My wife works at the VA and she had spoken of him so I asked if she had heard anything from him. She said he had indeed mentioned that he put all of his building plans on hold until they figure out what is going on. It wasn't long before he took another position at another VA hospital and moved on. Not only did the VA lose a doctor, the whole community lost a doctor. Not only did the city lose out on a new home at the golf course, we lost the family who would reside in that house. That loss cannot be measured. I recall two other such instances where nurses at the VA were also planning on building in town. I had answered many of their questions during their planning processes, and then they too decided otherwise. These are just a few examples of the adverse effect this issue has had on the community.

Issue #2. The EIS Alternative A states: "Water use for the proposed new facility in Hot Springs is projected at 1.1 million gallons per year, and wastewater generation is projected at 0.8 million gallons per year. The Hot Springs City Engineer stated that system capacity exists for new water users. The projected wastewater generation rate is significantly reduced from the current VAMC wastewater generation rate. The Hot Springs City Engineer noted that concerns have been raised regarding anaerobic conditions developing in the treatment plant clarifier due to average flows being significantly lower than the design flow. However, it is unknown at what average flow such conditions would develop (Bastian 2014). A significant reduction in inflow from VA operations could result in adverse impacts to the Hot Springs wastewater treatment plant." The EIS also says the water is discharged into Fall River, and that is not correct. The treated water is piped underground to a lagoon near Maverick Junction, and is used during the summer for crop irrigation.

The current level of flow into the wastewater treatment plant is very marginal, and the city has already experienced times when the wastewater in the primary clarifier has become slightly septic. We have had days where there was certainly a strong smell from the plant, and although it is difficult to prove what the problem was creating the smell, it is highly likely the smell is a result of the increased retention time in the primary clarifier. Higher wastewater flow into the plant will alleviate and/or

ID6-3: See group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to utilities and wastewater flows. The City Engineer has also provided additional information on wastewater plant flows and revenue. See also revised Sections 3.14, 4.14 and 5.1.13 of the Final EIS.

ID6-3

Commenter ID6: Don DeVries

prevent this condition, and decreased flow will make it happen on a more regular basis, or possibly continually. In one quarter of 2007, wastewater from the VA was 3,944,000 gallons. In the same quarter of 2013, wastewater from the VA was 2,638,000 gallons. The reduction estimated in the preferred Alternative A would reduce the flow to 800,000 annually. This is a major impact.

With low flows, one obvious solution could be to change from a mechanical plant to a lagoon system for wastewater treatment. This has been looked at during the last few years, when I was Mayor. Much of the outflow line to Maverick would have to be enlarged to accommodate raw sewage. The cost of increasing the outflow lines to Maverick lagoons would be approximately \$8,000,000. The cost of reconstructing the necessary shallow lagoons was not determined, but it would be substantial. Lagoons would have to be larger than the current lagoons, so additional land acquisition would be needed, and to prevent pumping costs, the lagoons would logically be located near Maverick. The preferred alternative A would reduce flow, and with reduced flow into the wastewater plant, something must be done to provide adequate wastewater treatment. Would mitigation costs be paid to the city of Hot Springs to enable these necessary updates to the system if the preferred alternative A in the EIS is chosen?

Issue #3. The draft EIS addresses school student numbers, and the affect of Alternative A. The EIS states: "The reduction of approximately 216 FTEEs whose residence is Fall River County would have a minor impact on the capacity of the Fall River County school districts. There were 1,088 students enrolled in the three districts at the end of the 2014 school year (see Table 3.11-1). Students account for approximately 15 percent of the population, or 150 students per 1,000 residents, based on the 2015 projected population of 7,262 for Fall River County (see Table 3.10-1). Using this simple ratio, if all 216 FTEEs relocated out of Fall River County with school-age children, the enrollment would decrease by approximately 32 students or 2.9 percent. This decrease would be minor when compared to the evaluation criteria. Because more than half of the FTEEs (116 of 216) would be eligible for retirement by FY 2020 (see Section 4.10.2.2.1) and would probably not have school-age children at home, the impact on school enrollment would be much less. Assuming the remaining 100 FTEEs would relocate from Fall River County and all would have school-age children, the decrease in school enrollment would be 15 students or 1.3 percent, which would be a minor impact."

It is not reasonable to use county school enrollment instead of the Hot Springs school district enrollment. I recently went to the Hot Springs administration office to see if the above information was close to correct. The student population is currently at 814. The number of students in the Hot Springs schools whose parents work at the VA is 95. This is nearly 12 % of all students. This information was easy to get, and yet the draft EIS states that if all the students from the 216 FTEEs left, it would be a decrease of 32 students. The actual impact directly from the school administration is three times the "estimate" used in the draft EIS. The EIS goes on to say that over half of the current VA employees can retire over the next five year period, and this again supports the theory the VA has not replaced many, if any, of the employment vacancies in recent years.

In 1995, the total employment at the Hot Springs VA was about 490 FTEEs, and the student count was 1001. The current VA employment is about 357 now, with a student count of 814. We have already seen a significant decline in students, partially or maybe wholly, from the reduction of VA FTEEs.

Census numbers of the city of Hot Springs have been declining, as is happening with almost all towns of populations of less than 5000. The population of Hot Springs over the last few census periods were: 1980 – 4742, 1990 – 4325, 2000 – 4129, and 2010 – 3711. Part of his population decrease is because of the reduced employment at the Hot Springs VA. Another major part of the decrease is the way domiciliary patients are counted. Historically, patients at the VA domiciliary were included in the census counts, and today none are counted. This could account for a reduced count of about 400 or

ID6-4: The potential impact on community services has been revised to look at impacts on the community schools. See revised Sections 3.11 and 4.11 in the Final EIS.

ID6-4

<p style="text-align: center;">Commenter ID6: Don DeVries</p>	
<p>more VA veterans receiving care. People retire near healthcare, and with less veteran healthcare being provided, we have seen veterans moving away from Hot Springs, and even more veterans deciding not to relocate to Hot Springs.</p> <p>Issue #4. I don't know how many times I have heard from the VA that doctors don't want to move to, and live in Hot Springs. The draft EIS states: "VA has difficulty maintaining high-quality, safe, and accessible care at the Hot Springs campus." At an early public meeting Ed Renstrom, a local veteran, said he was tired of continually having a different doctor when he went for appointments at the Hot Springs VA. The doctor seeing him (about 3 years ago now), told him he wanted to stay in Hot Springs permanently, but the VA would not offer him employment that would allow him to stay here. I was at one of the very early public meetings in Rapid City where it was stated the VA could not interest doctors in relocating to Hot Springs. I was sitting next to Dr. George Waxler, a retired dentist from the Hot Springs VA, and he said that was absolutely not true. I have heard the same comment from Dr. Garry Strauser, retired radiologist from the Hot Springs VA. In fact, he offered to work part time after his retirement as needed but the VA administration did not want his service. I could cite more examples, but as we were told at a recent public meeting regarding the EIS, several or even many many comments will have no more weight than a single comment submitted. I am sure there will be many comments from the public, and even retired VA doctors regarding this lack of willingness to hire professionals to serve the veterans.</p> <p>In closing, in the draft EIS it is stated: "Thus, many of the proposed reductions in FTEEs at the VA Hot Springs campus could occur as retirements that could happen with or without the reconfiguration." This tells me the VA has been, and will continue not to replace positions as openings occur. This information had to come from the VA administration during the preparation of the draft EIS. The purpose of the needed reconfiguration is, as the EIS states: "...to reconfigure health care services in the BHHCS is to provide high quality, safe, and accessible health care for Veterans well into the twenty-first century..." I believe the high quality, safe and accessible healthcare for veterans has already been severely compromised in the Hot Springs facility. The history of eliminating services and employees has damaged healthcare for our veterans. This administrative decision of not hiring must be reversed for veteran healthcare. Listen to the hundreds and hundreds if not thousands of comments already received during the EIS comment period. The veterans want healthcare that has been eliminated, and want it at the Hot Springs VA.</p> <p>The community has been an integral part of veteran healthcare in Hot Springs. I seriously doubt this kind of community support and willingness to help will be found in many localities. Why give up this important contribution to veteran healthcare from a community willing and able to help? At this point, because of the VA administrative actions, it will take some time to regain trust and to re-establish the community's help, but without a doubt, it can, and will happen again in "The Veterans Town".</p>	<p>ID6-4: While there may be some exceptions to every situation, VA maintains the recruitment of qualified medical and clinical staff has been, and continues to be a problem at Hot Springs and is one of the drivers for action.</p> <p>ID6-5: VA considers this statement as support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.</p>

Commenter ID7: John DiCiaccio

Commenter ID7: John DiCiaccio

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, May 10, 2016 3:55 PM

Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Save the Hot Springs VAMC

-----Original Message-----
From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, April 30, 2016 11:48 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Save the Hot Springs VAMC

To whom this letter is concerned,

On March 12, 2016 I made an appointment to see my Primary Care Provider. I found out that my previous Doctor had left his Position for another VAMC. So yet again a new Doctor came on board so I made an appointment to see him. Come to find out, I can't get in until May 16th, 2016. In the meantime, this replacement Doctor suddenly quite and he is to be replaced by a temporary Doctor until a permanent Doctor can be hired. So much for the 30 day wait time.

This activity is a direct result of the upcoming closer of a Facility that in 2003 had saved my life. I came here in November of '03' because of my existing [REDACTED] symptoms. I moved here from Colorado because of the wonderful life saving Treatment I had received and continue to receive today. This pending closure coupled with forcing me to drive 1.5 hours to Fort Meade to get care that I used to get by driving only ten minutes from my house to the VAMC, has become extremely problematic for me.

My [REDACTED] symptoms have been exacerbated because of all this non sense and going to our local Civilian Hospital is not an option I care to entertain. The so called "Choice Card" has been to difficult for me to navigate through and the whole process simply puts me in a bad place. My story is not unique, as it is the same story shared by many Veterans through out the four state Region. This must stop now before lives are ruined or lost because of the decisions made by those people who simply look at the \$\$\$ and not at the level of Health Care our Veterans deserve.

Respectfully,

John DiCiaccio
Vietnam Veteran

ID7-1: Under all of the alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care, including the Veterans Choice Program. See also group response in E.3.1 in Appendix E relating to distance Veterans must travel.

ID7-1

Commenter ID8: Dorothy Ann Dygas

Commenter ID8: Dorothy Ann Dygas

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 1, 2015 3:46 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Hot Springs

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 01, 2015 11:08 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Hot Springs

To whom it may concern: I am writing on behalf of myself and my husband (Thomas J. Nary, US Army/Ret.) who uses the VA in Fort Meade, SD, and is well satisfied with the treatment he has received. We are long time residents of Belle Fourche, SD. While we empathize with the impact the VA's proposed changes in Hot Springs may have on that city, we feel it will be more economical for the entire VA system to centralize special services in Rapid City, SD. Many people who are not veterans, including myself as the spouse of a retired veteran, regularly travel to Rapid City for medical care. The survival of the entire VA system will ultimately depend on economic realities, especially since many of the people protesting the proposed change are the same people who regularly vote for politicians who refuse to consider federal tax increases to meet the needs of our nation and most especially our veterans. In the northern hills there is a good transport system to assist veterans who cannot get to their treatment facility without help. If the southern hills do not have such transportation in place, funds should be allocated to ensure that such help is made available to those affected by the proposed change. Sincerely yours,
Dorothy Ann Dygas.

ID8-1

ID8-1: Thank you for your comment. We interpret your comment as support for the proposed reconfiguration with respect to the facilities proposed in Rapid City.

Commenter IE1: Robert Eisenbraun

Commenter IE1: Robert Eisenbraun

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Robert Eisenbraun
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs S.U. 57247
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.6 Employment.

Need: Property values will go down because 35+ FTE's will leave. They are among the highest paid people in town & without their income spent in Hot Springs, business will close & move. It's not just the VA employees but everybody that

Purpose: leaves here. Property values will go down & nobody will buy our houses because they won't be anything here.

2.3.5
Alternative E- Save the VA
Proposal

I, Robert Eisenbraun give permission/authorization for Susan Peters enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: [Signature] Date: 01/19/2016

IE1-1

IE1-1: While the EIS does not provide a detailed look on property values, VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs. see also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts.

Commenter IE2: Jill Evangelista

Commenter IE2: Jill Evangelista

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Jill E. Evangelista

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 4.10.2.1.1 and 4.10.2.2.1

Need: *This small rural community is a town full of friendly, welcoming people who are always looking for new ways to involve and connect with its veterans and citizens. A peaceful, tranquil and totally beautiful setting for Veterans to heal emotionally, physically and socially. We have a large number of vets who have chosen to move to & live in HS, for the reason of wanting their loved ones to live in the best care of them we need Alternatives E & not G. I grew up in this town assisting and interacting with the vets. My employees @ the HS VA brought in families, children and their experiences to share w/ the community and keeping HS a vibrant town with home selling & buying, vital business, a good sized school with an outstanding reputation and deeply committed teachers.*

Economically our sm. community will be devastated if the VA leaves. Schools have gone down the last 25 yrs. Home sales & buying suffering. Please keep our VA intact.

Jill E. Evangelista give permission/authorization for HS Chamber of Commerce enter this information online on my behalf. Justin Garsman

JEB
Signature Jill E. Evangelista Date 1-27-16

in HS

IE2-1: VA recognizes and appreciates the devotion that the residents of Hot Springs have to their town, the Veterans and the Hot Springs medical center. VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on businesses and schools and has revised Sections 4.10 and 4.11 the Final EIS to address potential impacts on the local community of Hot Springs. See also group response in Table E-2 relating to socioeconomic impacts.

IE2 -2: VA is counting this statement as support for keeping the Hot Springs medical center fully operational.

IE2-1

IE2-2

Commenter IE3: Theodore Ebert

Commenter IE3: Theodore Ebert

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Monday, November 16, 2015 11:31 AM

Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] EIS

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, November 05, 2015 9:29 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] EIS

My name is Theodore Ebert. in the IES scoop it shows Pierre and other communities to the northeast that are shown to utilize the BHHCS, those numbers are not entirely accurate I have visited with a few of the vets who are from those areas and they all say the same thing. they have been routed to the Ft Mead VA by the VA system and that they usually go to their own CBOC or to the larger facility in Sioux Falls. that the VA sent them to FT Mead for no apparent reason. they all so stated their normal care was in Sioux Falls. in the scoop it also stated cost of removal of Asbestos and lead base paint, this was all done during the 1980's renovation of the Hot Springs VA, they even replaced all the tiles on the floor, pipe wrapping and sodium blasted all painted surfaces that could not be replaced. the long pipe runs from the boilers to the main complex that are no longer in use were also done. I know this because I was there during the reconstruction process. also in the PCE (Patient Care Encounters) within the Scoping report it shows a rather dim appraisal of the Hot Springs VA. this is also jaded, The Hot Springs VA is a hands on facility! the care givers their are suppose to assist in solving patient problems, help the patient in problem solving, assist patients in their roll to reenter society in a productive way.

The Staff at the Hot Springs VA is noted by the Vets to assist in this fashion. Vets that have received poor service at other VA's find they finally have found a place that will hear their grievance and take some action. this visibly open sincere, caring environment gives a false impression in the report. it only makes since the Hot Springs VA would have a higher PCE than other facilities. Vets migrate to places were they feel they are getting the care they need and with it comes what ever grievance they may have. I have found FT. Mead to be very uninviting! the staff there is not helpful and I have had to wander the halls looking for my appointment location, asking personnel were I should be and not ever getting a clear answer. The answer to PCE's at Ft. Mead is denial of future service, they solve the problem by ejection. those Vets often end up at other facilities that are more lenient to their behavior. this is not an appropriate method for handling angry veterans. Turning the problem over to someone else is poor leadership!

Closing the Hot Spring VA is just sad. it benefits no one but the people invested in the change. they are wealthy already they don't need veterans care money to get wealthier. certainly no veteran will benefit. spend that same money in Hot Springs and those same investors will get just as wealthy at the Hot Springs Campus.

IE3-1: VA used the most up-to-date information available. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volume and services. Exhibit 1 in Chapter 1 has been updated and expanded to include more current Veteran population data.

IE3-2: VA is proud of the quality of care and service provided by the Hot Springs campus through the years. VA is committed to providing continued quality care to our Veterans and believes that, in light of the current challenges facing VA BHHCS today, the proposed reconfiguration will allow VA to better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

IE3-1

Under all of the alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care. Primary and some specialty care services will also remain available in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2.

IE3-2

Commenter IE4: Larry Edwards

Commenter IE4: Larry Edwards

COMMENT FORM

VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION SH
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

NAME: <i>LARRY E. Edwards</i>	ADD TO MAILING LIST? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
EMAIL ADDRESS:	IF YES, I PREFER TO BE CONTACTED BY: <input type="checkbox"/> EMAIL <input type="checkbox"/> U.S POST OFFICE MAIL
STREET ADDRESS: [REDACTED]	
CITY/STATE/ZIP: <i>Allamore, Mo. 69301</i>	
ORGANIZATION (if any): <i>Army</i>	
Comments: <i>Since the start of this impact study you have not listen to the people AT ALL. Your plan of closing H.S.V.A.M.C. is pretty plain. You have lied, cheat on the number VETERANS in the area. What about Rose Bud reservation and pine Ridge reservation believe or not there is a lot. Veterans in those 2 location also. There is only small amount of WWII left in the U.S.A. due to age. What about the Korean vet. If any of you people were alive when they were at war could you have survive like they did. I'm a Viet Nam. Vet. I was told when I was drafted I would be taken care of in my older age. I didn't know at the time that would mean a 185 mile drive one way to Fort Meade.</i>	

Comments must be postmarked or sent electronically by **February 5, 2016**.
Email to va.blackhillfuture@va.gov.
Postal mail to address on reverse.
Online submission direct to EIS contractor at www.blackhillseis.com (with option to submit anonymously).

IE4-1: VA thanks you for your service and is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that, in light of the current challenges facing VA BHHCS today, the proposed reconfiguration will allow VA to better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

Under all of the alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care, and group response in E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled. Primary and some specialty care services will also remain available in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2.

IE4-1

Commenter IE4: Larry Edwards

COMMENT FORM

VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

NAME: <i>Larry</i>	ADD TO MAILING LIST? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
EMAIL ADDRESS:	IF YES, I PREFER TO BE CONTACTED BY: <input type="checkbox"/> EMAIL <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. POST OFFICE MAIL
STREET ADDRESS:	
CITY/STATE/ZIP:	
ORGANIZATION (if any): <i>Page 2 #</i>	
Comments: <i>Also at the first meeting we went to we were told they would work with Box Butte hospital to get a V.A. Clinic here that hasn't happen. Also I was told by one of BBH staff they didn't the V.A. Like the V.A. The veterans choice card is completely worth less. another lie. What about all the younger vets. Gaardea, Desert Storm and the one that are going on now. If you people closing H.S.V.A.MC. like the freedoms that you have to thank all Veterans and keeps H.S.V.A.MC open. If you want to live under dictatorship and/or Islam. close it.</i>	
<i>Larry E. Edwards.</i>	

Comments must be postmarked or sent electronically by **February 5, 2016**.
Email to vablackhillfuture@va.gov.
Postal mail to address on reverse.
Online submission direct to EIS contractor at www.blackhillseis.com (with option to submit anonymously).

IE4-2: VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. While there is not a VA clinic in Box Butte County, Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before and now potentially hundreds of providers are available to eligible Veterans. It is now an integral part of the proposed reconfiguration alternatives as a way to improve access to care. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IE4-2

IE4-3: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC open and fully operational. VA also notes that under the new preferred alternative A-2, VA would continue to provide primary care and some specialty care services on the existing Hot Springs campus.

IE4-3

Commenter IF1: Jane Farrell

Commenter IF1: Jane Farrell

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Jane M. Farrell

Address: [Redacted] Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

Email: [Redacted]

Release of Information to the Congressional Yes

Section: 3.10 Social Economic

Need and Purpose:

The figures alone contained in the environmental impact statement do not tell the whole story with respect to the economic cultural and social impact that downsizing and potential closure of the VA will have on the City of Hot Springs and the surrounding area. I have never been a patient at the VA, nor have I ever worked there, however, I am a lifelong resident of the town of Hot Springs, having been born here and been away only to attend college and law school and a one year judicial clerkship. Through the years, the VA Hospital and the Domiciliary not only provided excellent medical care for many veterans, but also employment for many of the local residents and brought to Hot Springs a more diverse population then I believe would be found in any other rural small community in South Dakota. Growing up, I knew a surgeon who had escaped during the Nazi Occupation of Hungary during WWII, a family that were refugees from Cuba, and professionals and families from all over our Country. They brought to Hot Springs not only their own individual culture and outlooks, but a willingness to be involved in our community to make it a better place for all who lived there knowing that in all likelihood, they would not be there for more than a number of years. They brought their families, which allowed the schools to have a diverse student population as well as a population with educated parents who desired a strong academic background for their children. This resulted in good schools and preparation for the children who attended the Hot Springs School System. It provided young people opportunities not available in other small communities such as serving as a volunteer. My daughter designed a semester long internship with the surgery department that helped her to develop an interest in health care. It also allowed for an element of disposable income available in the town. At one time, there were numerous shops, stores and services that no longer exist. This included two specialty women dress stores, two department stores that sold clothing for both genders from infant to adult, shoes and household goods. There were also two hardware stores, two lumber yards, two full staffed drug stores, at least one jewelry store at all times, several gift stores and at least three grocery stores, plus a small neighborhood grocery outlet. In addition there were more restaurants and gas stations to serve the community. There was a strong legal community and several medical clinics. The economy of Hot Springs was strong and viable.

Commenter IF1: Jane Farrell

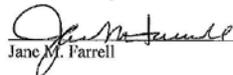
It is difficult in a small populated town to keep the downtown storefronts fully occupied, especially in a city like Hot Springs, where the main street follows the river and has a downtown area approximately 3 miles long. When the VA was functioning to full capacity, however, there were few empty storefronts.

What is the downsizing of the VA and potential closing of it done to Hot Springs? It has turned our town into a series of secondhand stores and empty storefronts. It is no longer possible to purchase locally many of the items that were formerly available. Our community service clubs have suffered due to the lack of membership that formerly drew upon many of the employees and family residents who served at the VA. Hot Springs was a city of many different cultures and backgrounds and traditions. We were in some ways a small melting pot of the whole worldwide community. There was also a sense of comradery between the professional staffs. I am aware of at least one life that was saved because the physicians at the VA Hospital were able to work hand in hand with the community physicians in an emergency medical case. I think it is unrealistic to think that the quality medical service formerly provided by the VA can now be absorbed by existing facilities in Hot Springs that will be forced to provide the necessary care, not only for the community, but for our veterans.

The location of the VA in Hot Springs also attracted new residents to our town. Numerous veterans came to the VA to receive treatment, found that they liked living in Hot Springs and their families soon followed. The housing market was strong, the classrooms full and those providing retail goods and services were successful.

In other statements that have been provided through this process, there are many studies and indicators of the economic reality (see for example the statement submitted by the Fall River County Commissioners). I think it is important that when an environmental impact is being determined that the very real detrimental impact on the economic, cultural and traditions of the community also be considered. What has the downsizing and potential closing of the VA done to the community of Hot Springs? It has devastated it.

Thank you.


Jane M. Farrell

5-5-16
Date

IF1-1

IF1-1: Thank you for your comment. VA recognizes and appreciates the strong ties and influences that operation of the Hot Springs VAMC has had on the Town of Hot Springs.

VA also recognizes the potential adverse impacts that the proposed reconfiguration could have on the local economy and businesses. Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS have been revised to address these local impacts. VA will take every step possible to ensure existing employees keep their jobs, such as with retraining efforts. VA notes that it would continue a presence on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2, and also that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate in two buildings on the existing Hot Springs campus. The center would bring up to 120 jobs to the area, which should also help address potential economic concerns.

The primary driver, however, is VA's commitment to providing quality care to its Veterans and VA believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

Commenter IF2: Irma Fees

Commenter IF2: Irma Fees

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Irma Fees

Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.4 Income

Need: the town of Hot Springs needs the VA hospital to stay in Hot Springs. It is the heart of the community for 107 years. Hot Springs is the Veteran Town not Rapid City. It is the biggest employer. It provides economic stability for many families, the schools and businesses. It provides jobs on

Purpose: a pay scale that is higher than any other employed in Hot Springs. The residents would see their property value decrease substantially. Rapid City does not need the VA hospital. It has many businesses and is economic stable. Hot Springs needs this hospital and the employees it brings with it. I support 2.3.50 Alternative F. Expand the services at the VA Hot Springs Campus - the Veterans prefer Hot Springs over the proposed relocation to Rapid City.

I, Irma Fees give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Irma Fees Signature 3-22-16 Date

IF2-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

To clarify, however, the current hospital is not being moved to Rapid City. Under the preferred Alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Under all of the alternatives, Veterans will have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IF2-1

Commenter IF2: Irma Fees

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Irma Fees
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2.2 Limited ability to meet VA standards
 for Residential Treatment
 Need: [Redacted]

provides This VA Hot Springs campus is the best location for residential treatment. Hot Springs is a very quiet and peaceful environment. Most businesses are closed by 10:00 pm. The number of bars are less than 10. Results from good Veterans who have used

Purpose: the VA dom in Hot Springs proves it works. Construction could be done on the existing buildings to meet all new guidelines for the single Veteran with a child if needed. The cost for renovation is always less than building from the ground-up. Our campus here at Hot Springs is beautiful with well kept lawns and plentiful trees. Allow more veterans into dom to be healed. Again like everything else, the current administrators have decreased the number of Veterans allowed in the Dom. In 1983-400. In 2016 100
Irma Fees give permission/authorization for _____ to _____

enter this information online on my behalf.

Irma Fees 3-22-16
 Signature Date

IF2-2: VA believes that the more urban setting in Rapid City offers more advantages and opportunities for residential treatment, relating to successful community reintegration. The discussion in Section 1.2.2.3 of the Final EIS has been expanded to address VA's research and findings in this area.

IF2-2

Commenter IF2: Irma Fees

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Irma J. Fees
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2 Difficulty Recruiting & Retaining Staff

Need: This statement is false. Hot Springs is a beautiful place surrounded by national parks, state parks & forest. People want to will move here to work if there was job security. The threat of our VA hospital closing keeps staff away. Also, the speciality areas like ICU, surgery, podiatry, & ^{nuclear} medicine have

Purpose: been cut out of our available services. This gives a "red flag" to recruiting new staff into our area. "Who would want to come to a facility that has such limited services? Prior to having the Hot Springs VA become (1) with the VA Ft Meade, staff hired would stay until retirement. I came to work at the VA Hot Springs in 1983. The hospite/ had an ICU unit, CR, nursing home ward and 3 floors of patient beds. On back,

I Irma Fees give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Irma J. Fees Signature 3-23-16 Date

IF2-3: While there may be some exceptions to every situation, VA maintains the recruitment of qualified medical and clinical staff has been, and continues to be a problem at Hot Springs and is one of the drivers for action.

IF2-3

Commenter IF2: Irma Fees

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Irma Fees

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.1.4 Cost per Patient too High

Need: the cost per patient is too high because the number of patients has been dropped to 5 beds. The VA HS needs to be able to increase their bed capacity and patient load. The Veterans have told me that they would rather stay at Hot Springs then be shipped off to

Purpose: FT Meade or Rapid City BUT they don't have that choice. They are transferred out. In 1983, the patients were allowed to stay at the hospital. Hospitals must meet all certifications and standards of care to be an accredited hospital for 1 patient as well as 500 patients. Of course, this would bring operating costs up for HS than the other VISN 23 sites because those sites have more inpatients. Allow Hot Springs to have more in-house patients.

Irma Fees give permission/authorization for Irma Fees to enter this information online on my behalf.

Irma Fees Signature Date 3-22-16

IF2-4

IF2-4: The EIS has been revised to further clarify the need for the proposed reconfiguration relating to the challenges in keeping the hospital open. VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. One of the integral elements under all of the proposed reconfigurations is that Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before and now potentially hundreds of providers are available to eligible Veterans. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IF3: Joseph Ferro

Commenter IF3: Joseph Ferro

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: JOSEPH FERRO
Address: [REDACTED]
HOT SPRINGS, SD 57747
Phone: [REDACTED]
e-mail:

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 2.3.5 & 3.10.2.3

Need: I PERSONALLY KNOW OF THREE VETERANS FROM THE DENVER AND NORTHERN COLORADO REGIONS WHO HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO THE HOT SPRINGS FACILITY FOR COUNSELING. ALL THREE WERE REFERRED BY THE DENVER V.A. THEY ARRIVED IN HOT SPRINGS AND WERE SHOCKED TO FIND THE TREATMENT PROGRAM NEEDED WAS BEING PHASED OUT!

Purpose: AT LEAST ONE OF THESE VETERANS HAD PLANNED ON MOVING WITH HIS FAMILY TO HOT SPRINGS AND LIVE IN THE COMMUNITY. NOW HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MOVE HERE FOR TREATMENT AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT.

I JOSEPH FERRO give permission/authorization for to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: JOSEPH FERRO Date: 1/22/2016

IF3-1: Veterans treated in the RRTP come from all over the United States and a large number come from Colorado. They would be able to receive high quality treatment in Rapid City, if the RRTP is moved there as part of the reconfiguration. Section 1.2.2.3 of the Final EIS has been expanded to address the advantages an urban setting offers for residential treatment, particularly related to community re-integration.

IF3-1

Commenter IF3: Joseph Ferro

- PAGE 2 -

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: JOSEPH FERRO
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2.1 & 2.3.5

Need: IN NOVEMBER OF 2014, I MET AND
BRIEFLY BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH A NATIVE
AMERICAN SENIOR CITIZEN WHO IS A KOREAN
WAR VETERAN. THE MAN TOLD ME THAT HE
IS "HEARTSICK" REGARDING THE PROPOSED
CLOSING OF THE HOT SPRINGS V.A. FACILITY. HE
TOLD ME THAT HE NO LONGER DRIVES AND WOULD

Purpose: BE FRIENDS BRING HIM TO HOT SPRINGS
MEDICAL CAMP AT THE V.A. - HE SPEAKS OF
ITS CONVENIENCE AND SUPERB MEDICAL
CARE AT THE V.A. HE DID NOT KNOW
WHAT HE WOULD DO IF THE HOT SPRINGS
V.A. CLOSES.

IF3-2

I JOSEPH FERRO give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Joseph Ferro Date: 1-22-2016

IF3-2: Native American Veterans would have the choice, under all the alternatives, to use either a VA or IHS system for their care as a result of a national Memorandum of Understanding that has been established between VA and Indian Health Service. They would also still be able to receive primary care through the new CBOC in Hot Springs. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

Commenter IF3: Joseph Ferro

- PAGE 3 -

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Joseph Ferro
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.1 2.3.5

Need: IN EARLY SUMMER OF 2013, MY WIFE AND I MET A Couple who had just moved to Hot Springs. The husband is a specialized Psychologist in PTSD TREATMENT and has worked for V.A. FACILITIES IN CALIFORNIA. THEY MOVED HERE FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF WORKING FOR THE HOT SPRINGS V.A. PTSD TREATMENT PROGRAM.

Purpose: Within several months he found out the treatment program was being phased out and he would be transferred to an Alabama facility. He moved by early 2013. had his wife had to sell their home - his wife had to give up a teaching position at Chadron State College.

IF3-3

IF3-3: Thank you for your comment and sharing your stories of how people have been affected by the ongoing and proposed changes at the Hot Springs VAMC. They are being included in the public record.

I Joseph Ferro give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Joseph Ferro 1-22-11
 Signature Date

Commenter IF3: Joseph Ferro

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet - PAGE 4 -

Name: JOSUAK FERRO
Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs, S.D. 57747
Phone: [REDACTED]
e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.1.2 & 2.3.5

Need: As a strong supporter of the Cornerstone Rescue Mission in Rapid City, I maintain contact with that Ministry and know for a fact that a sudden surge in homeless veterans in Rapid City would be overwhelming to those facilities. In the eventual closing of the Hot Springs V.N. Facility, there

Purpose: are estimates that the homeless veteran population in Rapid City would more than double. There are no ministry groups that have the capability of facilities to assist such a growth.

I JOSUAK FERRO give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Joseph Ferro Date: 1-22-16

IF3-4: VA appreciates the concerns the commenter has raised related to the ability to care for the homeless veterans in the Rapid City area. Their care and treatment have been taken into account in the proposed reconfiguration.

IF3-4

Commenter IF4: Norma Fleharty

Commenter IF4: Norma Fleharty

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Norma Fleharty

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Purpose: _____

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Norma Fleharty Date 1/22/16

Commenter IF4: Norma Fleharty

Addition Comment:

Concern #1 Property Values will go down & Taxes go up
 #2 We now have a nice new STATE Veterans Home here & if ^(RESIDENTS) they should need medical care they would have to be ambulated to another town
 #3 Population goes down so businesses can no longer afford to stay open
 #4 New larger school facilities have been built & if families move out for employment this will be a waste
 #5 Veterans travel to Hot Springs for their medical care, now they will have to go even farther. Some of these come from Nebraska, Wyoming, the reservation & some even farther away.
 #6 A sick person needs to be where it is peaceful & quiet. Rapid City is hustle & bustle and anything but peaceful & calm

Norma Fleharty
 Signature

1/22/16
 Date

IF4-1

IF4-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and this has been addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS, relating to socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services (including schools).

IF4-2

IF4-2: The South Dakota State Veterans Home in Hot Springs contracts with local community providers for their residents primary care services.

IF4-1

IF4-3: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled. An important element under the proposed reconfiguration is that Veterans would have more options to receive care from community providers closer to where they live.

IF4-1

IF4-3

IF4-4: The hospital is not moving to Rapid City, but rather Veterans would have the option of receiving care from community providers closer to where they live. Under the new preferred Alternative A-2, primary care and limited specialty care services would be available on the existing Hot Springs campus. The RRTP would be moved to Rapid City to take advantage of the better opportunities available there to help ensure successful community integration (see expanded Section 1.2.2.3 in Final EIS that addresses this). Although a site has not yet been selected, overall setting and RRTP design would incorporate features to promote feelings of peace and calm where important to treatment.

IF4-4

Commenter IF5: Franklin Foster

Commenter IF5: Franklin Foster

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: FRANKLIN D. FOSTER
 Address: [REDACTED]
HOT SPRINGS, SD 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: [REDACTED]
 Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1
 Need: The customers know what they need and how well it is done. convince politicians to spend out money to give us what they have granted regarding care. do not sabotage the facility for some non-van-walk out office. Everything is here to provide quality of VA's health care.

Purpose: I relocated to Hot Springs to be near family to access the Veterans Affairs Medical Center. I have lived here 18 years. The VA meets my medical needs now. I do not think I could drive to Rapid City for treatment the whole time. My vision is fading. I do not want to get health care from a private practice. They do not have the experiences and care that the VA provides. Love it!

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date 2-26-16

IF5-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC hospital open and all the services fully functional.

IF5-2: VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. Under all of the alternatives, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option (including the Veterans Choice Program) and quality of care.

See also group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled concerns.

IF5-1

IF5-2

Commenter IF5: Franklin Foster

Addition Comment: ~~plus all the excess paper work.~~
~~The choice card is a good concept,~~
~~there are too many issues that go along~~
~~with it. Excessive paper work speaking~~
~~with call centers that are located in states~~
~~away if you can get through appointments~~
~~that are made call fall apart there is no~~
~~follow up call centers to see what problems~~
~~you encountered, like scheduling eye~~
~~exams in Ft Meade, when I cannot drive~~
~~and will not take the shuttle with~~
~~alcohol and drug Rehab individuals~~
~~value as learning. Do Not let the Veterans~~
~~down take care of our needs with~~
~~Respect to benefits, require the same~~
~~from your employees. Keep the VA~~
~~paid doctors to stay or rotate out~~
~~with in our areas and all your~~
~~thoughts relating to everything you~~
~~have read about will open your~~
~~eyes Robert McDonald's should~~
~~go on a Undercover Boss.~~

Franklin D. Foster 2-26-16
 Signature Date

Commenter IF6: David Fuller

Commenter IF6: David Fuller

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: David Fuller

Address: [Redacted]

Oral, SD 57766

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.5 3.11

Need: Economic living here will cause many more miles of travel for necessity. The table for Labor Force is not correct because VA would not give long term contracts and told other to transfer out of here.

Purpose: Dad disabled really helped here and I won't still be able to be here to get all of health needs here. I would have had to move somewhere else and if VA closed here, now I would have move as the town will dry up.

I _____ give permission/authorization for Mary Helen Pedersen to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature David Fuller Date 2-20-16

IF6-1: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to concerns over distance travelled. An integral element under all of the proposed alternatives is that Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IF6-2: VA believes the VA labor force data are correct. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volume and services.

IF6-1

IF6-2

IF6-1

Commenter IF7: Joyce Farrell

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: JOYCE FARRELL

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, S.D. 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10 Socio economics

Need: please see attached sheet

Purpose: please see attached sheet

I JOYCE FARRELL give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Joyce M. Farrell Date 6/13/16

Commenter IF7: Joyce Farrell

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Growing up in Hot Springs I was always impressed and comforted to know our community was "The Veteran's Town". To my knowledge no other community in the surrounding area is the veteran's town. Hot Springs has always provided excellent service to our veterans whether the veteran was living at the Veterans Administration Center or residing in the community.

Having managed the Department of Labor and Regulation offices for Fall River, Custer, and Oglala Lakota Counties for 35 years, I have seen the number of individuals who have moved to our area, specifically Hot Springs, to be near the excellent care provided by the employees at the BHHCS. Currently employed at the Fall River County Treasurer's office I am still seeing new veteran residents each week who have moved to Hot Springs to receive care.

The BHHCS is the lifeblood of our community; the services provided affect the entire community. I have had the opportunity to visit with many, many veterans; many who are receiving assistance in the chemical dependency program. Each veteran states unequivocally the peaceful environment of our small community is what is needed to learn how to live chemical free, whether from the ravages of alcohol or drugs. The veteran patient appreciates the home town efforts to assist him/her.

I have assisted with school activities for over 38 years. I have seen the slow decline in student numbers as employees have had to relocate. The decreasing student population directly affects the educational opportunities available to our students. Many of these families had a veteran parent who had to move because the services he/she needed were no longer provided at the BHHCS.

One of the most frustrating factors of the discussion to close BHHCS is the struggle to get new businesses to relocate to Hot Springs and to keep the current businesses financially able to keep their businesses open. Growing up in Hot Springs we were a bustling, booming community. Now we struggle to provide many of the necessities to our local veteran residents and their families. I worked many years with the Chamber of Commerce. Many times we would have contact from a prospective business questioning the status of the local BHHCS. The discussion with many of the contacts would end when it became apparent the direct possibility of closing the BHHCS and not providing services to the local veterans.

I personally believe our past, current, and future veterans will be best served at the BHHCS located in Hot Springs, SD. We have the quiet, peaceful location needed by many veterans to recover from their physical and mental injuries; the workforce availability to employ the employees necessary to provide appropriate programs to the veteran; and the attitude we are "The Veteran's Town".

Thank you for the consideration of my remarks and keeping the Hot Springs Black Hills Health Care System a functioning, growing, viable care center for all our veterans.

Joyce Farrell 6/13/16

IF7-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on local community services are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS.

VA notes that under the new preferred alternative A-2, VA would maintain a presence on campus and continue to provide primary and some specialty care service in Building 12. In addition, a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus. It would bring up to 120 jobs to the area which should also help address potential economic concerns.

IF7-2: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC open and all services fully functional.

IF7-1

IF7-2

Commenter IF8: Kirk Fenner

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 1, 2015 3:45 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Possible closing of hospital in Hot springs SD

From: KIRK FENNER [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2015 3:11 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Possible closing of hospital in Hot springs SD

I would like to say that because of the back log of veterans the use this facility all the time in VA system I believe this is a big mistake to take away another hospital the supports and treats our vets we should adding more not less. These veterans deserve better care and local when possible it would be a hardship on almost all that use this facility to travel 50 or 60 miles for care. I don't believe there is that much of an impact on the VA to keep this Hospital open as it presently is and give our vets the care they deserve and care for them the way it should be, local if at all possible. My concern is the VA is just shifting the responsibility and care to their convenience and not the vets. This is so wrong it makes me mad that this has went this far already stop and smell the roses just once think about if it were your father or mother sister bother uncle aunt or other relative or friend would you like what is happening, I know I sure would not. Thanks for your time and reconsideration on these veteran's of ours.

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

IF8-1

IF8-1: VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. While the existing hospital would close, one of the integral elements under all of the proposed reconfigurations is that Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (including hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before and now potentially hundreds of providers are available to eligible Veterans. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care. See also group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to the distance Veterans must travel.

Commenter IF9: Barbara Fetters

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#59



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Sunday, May 01, 2016 9:26:56 PM
 Last Modified: Sunday, May 01, 2016 9:30:45 PM
 Time Spent: 00:03:48
 IP Address: 68.69.86.241

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name: Barbara Fetters, MD
 Address: [REDACTED]
 City/Town: Hot Springs
 State/Province: SD
 ZIP/Postal Code: 57747
 Email Address: [REDACTED]
 Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here-reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

By way of introduction, I am a family physician. I have lived in Hot Springs (HS) over 30 years, and have worked at the Hot Springs VA since August 1996, almost 20 years. I am the Section Chief for the Black Hills VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) program, and work at the Hot Springs campus. The C&P program is not slated for closure in the VA's proposal to limit services at the Hot Springs VA. It is part of the outpatient services that the HS facility provides.

I have several concerns about various aspects of the VA's proposal, which include closing the HS Domiciliary and building a new one in Rapid City, closing inpatient care and Urgent Care, moving many specialty services to Ft. Meade or Rapid City, and relocating primary care and other outpatient services.

CLOSING THE HOT SPRINGS DOMICILIARY AND BUILDING A NEW DOM IN RAPID CITY: The VA's plan to build a new domiciliary in Rapid City is very concerning to me. Moving the Dom 60 miles does not provide care closer to home, since most of the veterans the Domiciliary programs serve are not from the Rapid City area. Multiple studies have shown that the current buildings at HS are serving very well.

There is considerable documentation of the VA's inability to handle construction projects in a fiscally responsible and timely manner. (See References below.) The VA's plan to build a new facility just 60 miles away, to replace a facility that doesn't need replacing, by an entity that cannot manage building projects, is one that I, as a tax payer, strongly object to.

MOVING INPATIENT AND URGENT CARE, AND SPECIALTY MEDICAL SERVICES TO RAPID CITY AND FORT MEADE: The VA proposes to move many services to Ft. Meade and Rapid City to "provide care closer to home for veterans". Even a cursory look at the demographics of the HS VA's patient population shows that these veterans are not from the Rapid City/Ft. Meade area. The patient population the HS facility serves is from highly rural areas mostly east and south of Hot Springs. This area includes the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian Reservations. Moving services to Ft. Meade and Rapid City causes these veterans to travel FARTHER for care. Many of these veterans are elderly.

77 / 89

IF9-1: The RRTP is not being moved to Rapid City to be closer to home for Veterans. Rather, VA believes the more urban setting of Rapid City offers better opportunities for successful treatment and community integration. See revised Section 1.2.2.3 of the Final EIS regarding the reasons for re-locating the RRTP to Rapid City. VA also notes that Dom patients come from all over the service area and U.S. (see new RRTP data provided in Exhibit 1 of the Final EIS).

IF9-2: While the existing hospital would be closed under the proposed reconfiguration, Veterans would not necessarily have to go to Rapid City or Fort Meade for inpatient, specialty or urgent care. Rather, an integral component under all of the alternatives is that Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals, urgent care, specialty services), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before and now potentially hundreds of providers are available to eligible Veterans. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IF9-1

IF9-2

Commenter IF9: Barbara Fetters

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

to Ft. Meade and Rapid City causes these veterans to travel farther for care. Many of these veterans are already traveling extra distances for care, as inpatient and specialty medical services at the HS facility have been steadily decreased by VA management over the years. The rural veterans the HS VA serves are clearly not a priority for the VA.

MOVING OUTPATIENT SERVICES: Part of the VA's proposal includes the possibility of moving outpatient services to a different location in Hot Springs. Having worked at the HS campus for so long, I am puzzled as to why the VA thinks the current buildings are "too old" and are not fit to serve anymore. I have no complaints regarding the building in which I work. Its design is convenient to veterans and staff. We do not suffer from structural or physical plant deficiencies that limit our ability to perform our jobs. In C&P, we often see new veterans, people who have just recently been discharged from the military. Most of them have never been to a VA, or to the HS campus. Many of them have said to me: "This is a nice place. Why is the VA trying to close it?" The current space is more than adequate. I object to spending tax dollars to move outpatient services by building or leasing in a different location, especially since the VA has not attempted to define this plan in any meaningful way.

SUMMARY: The VA is proposing that it's plan will be cheaper and better for veterans. However, even a brief perusal of the costs involved, the demographics of the veteran population HS serves, and the profound difficulties the VA has had with building projects, shows that the proposed changes will cost more than the status quo and will have a severe negative impact on the rural veterans of this area.

Thank you for your time.

Barbara Fetters, MD
 PO Box 307
 Hot Springs, SD 57747


REFERENCES:

- <http://dailycaller.com/2015/12/02/report-shows-why-the-denver-va-hospital-is-a-total-failure-and-this-similar-hospital-is-a-total-success/>
- <http://www.ncca.org/pdfs/b178.pdf>
- <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/653585.pdf>
- <http://extras.denverpost.com/aurora-va-hospital/>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2015/09/04/poor-planning-bungled-engineering-and-delays-send-costs-soaring-for-va-hospitals-report-says/>
- http://www.denverpost.com/news/ci_27981959/senators-call-completion-va-hospital-aurora-outside-probe
- <https://coffman.house.gov/media-center/in-the-news/va-building-projects-riddled-with-mistakes-and-cost-overruns>

IF9-3

IF9-3: VA agrees that the existing historic buildings can be renovated and made suitable for continued use, and this has been clarified in the Final EIS. In fact, under the new preferred Alternative A-2, primary care and some limited specialty care services would be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus in a renovated Building 12.

Commenter IF10: Shane Fisher

Commenter IF10: Shane Fisher

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#13



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Saturday, October 31, 2015 11:15:06 AM
 Last Modified: Saturday, October 31, 2015 11:27:04 AM
 Time Spent: 00:11:58
 IP Address: 72.8.232.62

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name shane fisher
 City/Town gordon
 State/Province NE
 ZIP/Postal Code 69343
 Email Address [REDACTED]
 Phone Number [REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: *Respondent skipped this question*

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THIS DECISION IS BASED SOLELY ON THE FINANCIAL ASPECT. WHAT ABOUT THE HUMAN FACTOR? THESE VETERANS FOUGHT FOR THIS COUNTRY AND THEY DON'T ASK FOR MUCH IN RETURN!! IT SEEMS TO ME THAT WHETHER OR NOT THIS FACILITY SHOULD BE CLOSED SHOULD BE BASED SOLELY ON THE DECISION OF THE VETERANS THAT UTILIZE IT. NOT SOME BOUGHT, SOLD, AND PAID FOR E.I.S. THAT CAN BE SKEWED TO READ HOWEVER IT NEEDS TO IN ORDER TO FIT THE NEEDS OF THE BEAN COUNTERS AND POLITICIANS. MY FATHER SUPPORTED THAT FACILITY FOR 40 PLUS YEARS, HE PLAYED MUSIC FOR THE VETERANS AT CHRISTMAS AND MAY DEE CAKE DAY. HE SUPPORTED THAT TOWN AND HE EVENTUALLY DIED IN THAT HOSPITAL. SINCE HIS DEATH I ALSO PLAY MUSIC FOR THE CHRISTMAS PARTIES FOR THE VETERANS AND FEEL THAT THIS IS NOT ONLY A HOSPITAL BUT A NECESSITY FOR THESE VETS. THEY HAVE EARNED THE RIGHT TO GO TO HOT SPRINGS AND BE TREATED AT THE VA. THEY DON'T WANT TO GO ANYWHERE ELSE AND I DON'T FEEL THAT THEY SHOULD HAVE TO!!!

IF10-1

IF10-1: The Secretary will make an informed decision based on multiple factors to help determine what is best for Veterans. The decision will not be based solely on cost but on a host of factors VA deems important to ensuring the delivery of quality health care services to Veterans within the BHHCS service area.

Commenter IG1: Judith Gallagher

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: JUDITH GALLAGHER

Address: [REDACTED]

HOT SPRINGS SD 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 200- Alternatives A+E

Need: Before I turned 65, I used the VA as my health provider as I was eligible since my husband died as a result of Agent Orange. The care I received from the VA at any & all times was not only excellent, but far above & beyond excellence.

Purpose: Keep the VA in Hot Springs for the benefit of the vets who need it. Rapid City does not need another medical facility.

IG1-1

I, Judith Gallagher give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Judith Gallagher Signature Date 1-30-16

IG1-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing Hot Springs campus open and fully functional and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IG1: Judith Gallagher

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: JUDITH GALLAGHER

Address: [REDACTED]

HOT SPRINGS SA 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.1

Need: I fear the loss of population in our small town. The VA here is so very important not only to the well-being of the town, but the care they give our veterans.

Purpose: Keep the VA in Hot Springs where it was built & deserves to stay

IG1-1

I JUDITH GALLAGHER give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Judith Gallagher Signature 1-30-16 Date

Commenter IG2: Jon Galvin

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Jon Galvin

Address: [Redacted]

Phone:

e-mail:

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section:

Need: The percentage of veterans to population is very high. I use the clinic myself as a retired military veteran.

Purpose: To keep the community strong and support the many veterans in the community.

I Jon Galvin give permission/authorization for 23rd to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: [Signature] Date: 23 April 2016

IG2-1. Thank you for your comment. VA interprets your comment as support to keep the existing facility open and fully operational.

IG2-1

Commenter IG3: James Goeman

Commenter IG3: James Goeman

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: JAMES GOEMAN

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs S. Dak

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.11.2.5

Need: I moved to the area in 1990 and started a business from scratch. Have increased the size of business three times since 1990. I am afraid of the closure of the V.A. At Hot Springs could devastate my business and all I have worked so hard for.

Purpose: The reason I built my retirement home in Hot Springs is for the outstanding care I have received from the V.A. Over the year while living here I have seen them slowly take most of the care out of Hot Springs and move it to Fort Meade. This will also put a burden on me as a home owner and Veteran and business owner. I love the V.A. At Hot Springs and their care. I would have to travel 2 hours for care.

I Jim Goeman give permission/authorization for all to enter this information online on my behalf.

[Signature] Feb 1, 2016
Signature Date

IG3-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and Sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16 of the Final EIS have been expanded to address the local impacts on Hot Springs. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts.

IG3-1

IG3-2: VA interprets your comment as support to keep the existing facility open and fully functional. VA also notes that outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2. Also, while the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.

IG3-2

Commenter IG4: Wilbur Goesch

Commenter IG4: Wilbur Goesch

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Wilbur Goesch

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Purpose: in the 4 state area SD, WY, CO + NE,
~~Can you~~ show me where one vetera
in these states that will be better
off if they close Hot Springs VA?

years ago it was the best in the U.S.
(U.S. VA hospital)

(One of General Patton's 3rd Army MP!
that's me)

I Wilbur Goesch give permission/authorization for _____ to
 enter this information online on my behalf.

Wilbur Goesch 9 Mar 16
 Signature Date

IG4-1: VA is committed to providing quality care to our Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, VA notes that outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2. In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IG4-1

Commenter IG5: David Goodyear

Commenter IG5: David Goodyear

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: DAVID B. GOODYEAR

Address: [REDACTED]

Cypress TX 77433

Phone: 281-746-7492

e-mail: dgoodyear@sbcglobal.net

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: Would NOT like to see the VA shuttered

Need:

Moving from outside of mid-west back to the Northeast. We need a facility in the Area to service our vets.

IG5-1

Purpose:

I, David Goodyear give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: [Handwritten Signature] Date: 4-15-16

IG5-1: Thank you for your comment. The proposed reconfiguration includes continuing primary and some specialty care services in Hot Springs. In addition, Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IG6: Robert Gossel

Commenter IG6: Robert Gossel

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Robert Gossel

Address: [Redacted]

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: NO

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: I pray that never closes

Need: to stay in Hot Springs for the Colled Road it here long ago it is ok and it ok before in Greenport go good and the other at Stat name

Purpose: to go to Fall River Hospital the Golden must have a UNICARE Card & MEDICARE Card Hospital A, MEDICAL PART B

The one live at us the VA for from the Stat Home five years I pray for I paint the Murals and for seven years

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Robert Gossel Date: 4/28/16

IG6-1

IG6-1: Thank you for your comment. VA interprets it as support for keeping the existing facility open and fully functional.

VA also notes that the proposed reconfiguration includes continuing outpatient primary and some specialty care services in Hot Springs. While the existing hospital would close, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IG7: Mary Goulet

Commenter IG7: Mary Goulet

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mary Goulet
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, S.D. 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]
 Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.11.2.1.1

Need: The rural hospital in Hot Springs serves our community very well. There are not long waiting times. If all of the veterans use our facility if the VA closes, I may have longer wait times or have to drive to Rapid City. At my age this could be not only inconvenient but increasingly difficult as I get older. I do not look forward to longer

Purpose: drives or wait times. We need to retain our VA in Hot Springs. Therefore I want alternative E - Save the VA proposal - 2.3.5

It will service our veterans while our local hospital serves the rest of US

I Mary Goulet give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date _____

IG7-1: VA notes that the proposed reconfiguration includes continuing outpatient primary and some specialty care services in Hot Springs. While the existing hospital would close, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to driving distance and purchased care option and quality of care.

IG7-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IG7-1

IG7-2

Commenter IG7: Mary Goulet

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mary Goulet

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs, S.D. 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2.1

Need: I talk with veterans all of the time who use Evang Plunge. None of them are from Pennington Co, S.D. These veterans come from all over the country (last count was 26 states). because of the reputation of the Hot Springs VA and because they want to regain their emotional health/sobriety in the peaceful surroundings of the veterans town. They all tell me that

Purpose: They do not want to go to Rapid City or any other large city. One of the veterans I talked to last October while he was in the Dorn - sold his house in Denver and moved to Hot Springs, a town conducive to him retaining his sobriety.

After talking with veterans in the Dorn - most from Colorado and Nebraska, I want Alternative E - Save the VA proposal!

IG7-2

I Mary Goulet give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date _____

Commenter IG7: Mary Goulet

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mary Goulet
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, S.D. 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]
 Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.11.2.2

Need: When my husband and I were surrounded by flames during the Cascade Wildfire of 2007, one of the firefighters who saved us was a V.A. firefighter who also volunteered for the Hot Springs volunteer department. We need the V.A. fire department as a back up during extreme fires. If the V.A. closes, we will lose some of the firefighters

Purpose: who also assist Hot Springs when needed. Their move will be a loss to our fire department and also to our property values and taxes and all the domino effects.

I choose 2.35. Save the VA proposal to retain our firefighters

I Mary Goulet give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date _____

IG7-3: Thank you for sharing your story of how a VA firefighter came to your rescue. It is true that VA BHHCS would no longer staff and operate the VA Hot Springs FD since there would not be 24-hour inpatient care at the campus under the proposed reconfiguration. The VA Hot Springs FD has only received two to three requests from the Hot Springs Volunteer FD for firefighting services and its closure should not impact the capacity of the Hot Springs volunteer FD to provide the fire protection services the town of Hot Springs needs.

IG7-3

Commenter IG8: Rhonda Gunhammer

Commenter IG8: Rhonda Gunhammer

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Rhonda Gunhammer
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2.2 4 pause for care. \$3.10.

Need: I will have to drive my husband 40 Ft. Mead. Now it takes 20 minutes to drive here to the VA. Right now I take him to the VA 3x a month & see more in the future. It will take 1.5 hours one way 3x a month.

Purpose: My husband doesn't get reimbursed for gas mileage. We moved her from Interior, SD 2 years ago to be close to the VA in Hot Springs.

2.3.5. Alternative 2. Save the VA Proposal

I Rhonda Gunhammer give permission/authorization for Sara Petersen enter this information online on my behalf.

Rhonda Gunhammer 2-20-16
 Signature Date

IG8-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Eligible Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. Veterans still have the option of going to Fort Meade but it is not their only choice. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IG8-1

IG8-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IG8-2

Commenter IG9: Richard Gunhammer

Commenter IG9: Richard Gunhammer

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Richard Gunhammer
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: Sec 1.2-2.2-2 & 3.10.2.3. Heavy

Need: 2 years ago my wife & I moved to Hot Springs from Interior SD. We couldn't afford to travel for medical appointments. She drives me 20 min 3x a month & I expect to be going more often as I get older. I'd like the VA.

Purpose: closer we will have to travel to Fort Mead which is 1 1/2 half hours one way. I don't qualify for travel reimbursement & will have a hard time paying for this transportation & we can't afford to move again.

I want the VA to stay open 2.3.5 Alternative E. Save the VA proposal

I, Richard Gunhammer, give permission/authorization for Sarah Peterson enter this information online on my behalf.

Richard Gunhammer : 2-20-16
 Signature Date

IG9-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Eligible Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. Veterans still have the option of going to Fort Meade but it is not their only choice. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IG9-1

IG98-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IG9-2

Commenter IG10: Steve Griffin

Commenter IG10: Steve Griffin

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 1, 2015 3:45 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System.

From: Griff [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, December 01, 2015 8:14 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Dept of Veterans Affairs

RE: "Draft Environmental Impact Statement & National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation: Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System.

To whom it may concern,
 This proposed closing of the VA in Hot Springs, SD is really going to put an extra hardship on me and my family. It will only cause me to travel farther and farther as I age, which travel will only get harder and harder. The roads from Custer to Rapid City are often dangerous during the winter months which is very often snow/ice covered, not to mention the high number of deer on Rt 16 to Rapid. I've met numerous other Veterans over the present & past years who get their VA healthcare at the Hot Springs location, It's the only location within commutable distance, and they come from as far away as far Western WY, Pine Ridge & Rosebud, Lower Brule & Crow Creek Reservations Numerous small towns in rural SD, Colorado, Chadron, Alliance, Scottsbluff, and every little town in between in Nebraska to Hot Springs, SD.

It will also have one heck of an adverse effect of the little town of Hot Springs, both economically and long term viability of such a small

IG
10-1

IG
10-2

IG10-1: See group response in Section E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled by Veterans. The proposed reconfiguration includes continuing provision of outpatient primary and some specialty care services in Hot Springs. Eligible Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live.

IG10-2: See group response in Table E-2 relating to potential socioeconomic impacts on the local community of Hot Springs.

Commenter IG10: Steve Griffin	
<p>community.</p> <p>It's about time the VA think about it's Clients/Vets first. Not just about how to go about closing rural VA facilities that provide such great care to us in Hot Springs and in so many other rural communities in the states and locations listed.</p> <p>STOP the Closing and any disruption of services to us Vet and our families in Rural South Dakota.</p> <p>Respectfully Submitted</p> <p>Steve Griffin [REDACTED] Custer, SD 57730-0774 [REDACTED]</p> <p>2</p>	<p>IG10-3: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing facility open and fully operational.</p> <p>IG 10-3</p>

Commenter IG11: Geiser

Commenter IG11: Geiser

Rec'd 1-29-16

I am a veteran that uses the Hot Springs VA, and have for many years. The proposal to move the facility to Rapid City would personally affect me in several ways.

First, the travel time to receive care would increase from 2 miles round trip to 120 miles. Even though the preferred alternative by the VA includes providing a CBOC that would only be for routine appointments which as an older veteran, most of the appointments would not be routine.

Secondly, my property values would go down because of the number of employees that would have to leave as well as veterans that would need to move to be closer to the hospital. By losing several hundred high paying positions in a town this size would be devastating to the town and community. Less people would lead to less business, less competition and increased prices.

In reviewing the DEIS, I believe there are many misleading things that drew them to their preferred alternative. First of all, the needs statement is what is driving this movement.

The reason the VA has a hard time recruiting/retention is because nobody in their right mind would want to uproot their family to move to a job that has been threatened to be shut down for many years. If you are reading this, put yourself in their shoes. Would you take the chance of moving to a new location if you thought it was closing down in the next few years? It is expensive and traumatic for adults to move, let alone if you have children. This is not speculation. Interview your own employees. I personally know of 5 families that have moved in the past year because they believe that the VA will shut down in Hot Springs, so they wanted to get established in other locals before that happened. Pretty easy to confirm, just get the numbers from Human Resources.

All the other points indirectly deal with money. Residential care, compliance, and treatment can be addressed with updating the existing facility. If the facility was in terrible disrepair, I could see where it might not be feasible to update it, but this facility is in very good shape. I understand that this facility has never failed an inspection. As a taxpayer, I would demand that there would be a minimum of 3 bids to update the existing facility. I have a hard time believing that it will cost \$98,414,236 more to update an existing hospital in good shape than to build a brand new one, and leasing should not even be considered, just ask other Federal Agencies that have tried that. You have nothing at the end of the lease just like a car. Yep, you got into it cheaper than buying, but at the end of the lease, you have nothing. Before I made any decision on moving, I would get actual contractor bids from several companies, local and national to estimate the cost of upgrading the existing facility, not a Government estimate from engineers that haven't even seen the site. We already own the land and the building in Hot Springs. It is a National Treasure which means the Government must maintain it in some fashion anyway. Why not use that to our advantage and get additional federal funds designated for sites like this and help upgrade and maintain it?

The other needs are also not correct and based on speculation. The population center for the Hot Springs facility encompasses the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the Panhandle of Nebraska, parts of Wyoming, Southwestern South Dakota, and yes, Rapid City. The Save the VA committee has hard numbers showing the current numbers from these areas. Take that into consideration of the number of Veterans like myself that have had to go to Fort Meade for treatment because of the reduction of services at Hot Springs, and that number is even higher. I have had to go to Fort Meade on several occasions for things they used to be able to do in Hot Springs. Going to Rapid will be much further and more of a hardship for the Veterans living outside of Rapid. Your own Public meetings showed only one

1 of 2

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IG11-1: Under the proposed reconfiguration, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided in Hot Springs, and on the existing Hot Springs campus under the new preferred alternative A-2. In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IG11-2: Potential impacts on property values have been addressed in Section 4.11 of the EIS.

IG11-3: VA acknowledges that uncertainty regarding the Hot Springs campus future could also affect recruiting. However, the other reasons cited in Chapter 1 of the EIS are also considered to be valid.

IG11-4: VA acknowledges that the existing facility can be renovated for suitable use, but also confirms that renovation costs are higher. Section 2.3 of the Final EIS provides a more detailed cost breakout for each alternative.

IG11-5: Exhibit 1 in the Final EIS expands and further clarifies the Veteran population numbers in the VA BHHCS and serviced at Hot Springs. VA used the most up-to-date information available. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volumes and services.

Under the proposed reconfiguration, geographic access should improve as eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled, purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IG11: Geiser

person that wanted it in Rapid compared to all of the other meetings you held across the Region who strongly supported not only leaving the facility in Hot Springs, but increasing the services. Future population centers? That is speculation. If we are going to speculate, how many people would use Hot Springs if it was expanded to a state of the art facility? Even if the figures the VA is using are correct, which I am certain they are not, as a taxpayer, I would much rather spend more money on an existing structure than we own, than line someone else's pockets for a lease. I work in a leased Government facility and have for 14 years. We are now looking at losing our lease when it comes up for renewal because our Agency has determined that the lease costs us too much to renew. Check with other Federal Agency's before you jump into a lease, they will have years of data for you to compare leasing to buying.

The purpose doesn't matter if there is no need for change. But for the sake of argument all of the stated purpose actions are met by upgrading the existing facility. By doing that, you will have a hospital that enhances and maintains quality and safety of care and is accessible, shorter travel for Veterans and is closer to the Veterans in the tristate area. Hot Springs has a brand new State Veterans Home. Why wouldn't you support it with a state of the art hospital in the same town and save many miles of commuting and shared services? You don't have to worry about what to do with a National Treasure designation, displacing Veterans and employees, what it will do to the local community of Hot Springs. You also won't have to deal with Congressional's fighting you all the way with the proposed alternative, because it is clear that they support what is best for the Veterans, and what have we heard is best for the Veterans FROM THE VETERANS?

In conclusion, I am sure if you look at the costs again and sharpen your pencils, you will see you underestimated the cost for a new facility (does the hospital in Denver ring a bell?) and that you have overestimated what it will cost to retool the existing facility. I also believe if you track down the number of Veterans in the tristate area that currently use Hot Springs and would use Hot Springs if services were improved, you will also find your initial numbers are significantly different. I also believe that if you canvassed the VA employees nationwide and let them know that the Hot Springs VA was being expanded with state of the art surgical/medical equipment and that it was going to be here another 100 years, with what Hot Springs has to offer, they would move here with no reservations.

Isn't the choice clear? The preferred alternative should be Alternative E, Save the VA. Do what is right for the Veterans, choose E.

Thank you.



Tom Geiser

Zof2

IG11-6: VA has used the best information available at the time to develop cost estimates, and while final costs may be higher, the current estimates should provide a representative comparison of costs between alternatives. VA is unable to update the cost information provided in the EIS due to current appropriation restrictions.

IG11-7: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IG11-6

IG11-7

Commenter IG12: Gardner Gray

Commenter IG12: Gardner Gray

To: BHHCS
 From: Gardner Gray
 Re: BHHCS DEIS.
 December 4, 2015

*Rec'd
 1-19-16 SH*

I have enclosed some of my thoughts in italics, about your DEIS for the BHHCS. Allow me to get right to them.

From : xxv EXECUTIVE SUMMARY you state with regard to the PURPOSES and NEEDS of the BHHCS:

The purpose of VA's proposal to reconfigure health care services in the BHHCS is to provide high- quality, safe, and accessible health care for Veterans well into the twenty-first century (*This suggests that you are not providing high-quality care at present, which is confirmed by the lack of proper care from the Hot Springs facility due to removal of staff and services. Hot Springs used to represent everything you now find missing.*) by:

Providing locations and facilities that support VA's efforts to enhance and maintain quality and safety of care in the 100,000-square-mile catchment area (*You will in fact not be maintaining the Hot Springs and the Ft. Meade facilities. By removal of services and staff from Hot Springs, and your plans to close Ft. Meade, you are doing the exact opposite as you are removing the main locations for veteran health care in western SD, south east MT, northwest NE, south east WY including PINE*

IG12-1: VA has appropriately managed offered services to support patient volume and maintain quality and safe care at the Hot Springs campus. This has been further clarified in Chapter 1 of the Final EIS. In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and purchased care option and quality of care.

IG12-2: VA has no plans to close Fort Meade. As noted in the response above, VA will maintain some health services in Hot Springs, and Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. This is an integral part of the proposed reconfiguration.

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 12-1

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<p style="text-align: center;">Commenter IG12: Gardner Gray</p>	
<p><i>Ridge, RoseBud and other veterans from other central and western states who rely on care regarding PTSD)</i></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/># Ensuring facilities for Veterans receiving any services comply with accessibility requirements for handicapped individuals, (<i>The apparent needs of the facility point only to VA's failure to fulfill this requirement.</i>) support current standards of care, (<i>By VA admittance, this has not been done.</i>)and can be well-maintained within available budgets and resources./ (<i>There is no financial handicap as Congress has stated funding is available. And VA has millions of available dollars to support Plan A which is unnecessary and therefore, there is enough for Plan E which is.</i>)</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/># Increasing access to care closer to where Veterans reside <input checked="" type="checkbox"/># Reducing out-of-pocket expenses for Veterans' travel</p> <p>VA has identified a need to reconfigure health care services in the BHHCS catchment area because: (<i>The ADA has been with us for years. If there are maintenance items and safety issues that have been neglected then it is the management of the BHHCS that has failed the veterans not the facility itself.</i>)</p> <p>1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VA has difficulty maintaining high-quality, safe, and accessible care at the Hot Springs campus. (<i>This is prima facia false. The VA Plan A decision is not based on this. It is based on singular individual's personal goal to move the system to Rapid City regardless of inconvenience to veterans.What is so difficult in proving MRI's, CAT Scans, Sonograms, appointments sooner than 2 to 3 months, handrails, ramps and standard maintenance?</i>)</p>	<p>IG12-3: The Secretary will make an informed decision based on multiple factors to help determine what is best for Veterans. The decision will not be based solely on cost but on a host of factors VA deems important to ensuring the delivery of quality health care services to Veterans within the VA BHHCS service area.</p> <p>IG12-4: VA has indicated in the Final EIS that the existing facility can be renovated to meet standards and support suitable uses. This has been clarified in Chapter 2 with respect to the alternatives' abilities to meet this aspect of purpose and need.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">IG 12-3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">IG 12-4</p>

Commenter IG12: Gardner Gray

The Hot Springs VA is understaffed and underfunded by design.)

- 2 Existing locations and facilities constrain the quality of care, range of services, and access to care that VA offers to Veterans in the catchment area. (*This was not a problem for the one hundred years before Henry and D'Stasio were put in charge. Hot Springs used to be number one in the country for veteran care. Congress has clearly stated that money is not the problem. How does keeping Hot Springs open and fully serviced and staffed as it used to be, a constraint in the quality of care? The data simply do not support this statement.VA position is a manufactured one.*)

- 3 ... decisions made ... to “Honor America’s Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being.” (*If this be true and accurate, then your closing of Hot Springs is backwards if only because the thousands of veterans who use Hot Springs will have to drive from 60 to 90 more miles one way to get health services. Just a few years ago, the Hot Springs facility was fully funded, fully staffed, fully serviced and serving more than eight thousand veterans. You cannot hire quality staff at Hot Springs now because you do not offer secure long term positions. I drive fewer than 30 miles to Hot Springs. Your "convenient changes" will force me and thousands of others to double or triple that distance and time. Hot Springs is the only VA facility in the Hills that was constructed to be a hospital. It makes no sense to close it*

IG12-5

IG12-5: The health care needs of Veterans and the delivery of health care services have both changed significantly in the last 20 to 30 years, and the VA data and findings identify a situation today that calls for a re-alignment to help transform VHA health services from being provider-centric to being Veteran-centric to ensure that quality of care is maintained. VA believes that there is a need for change in the health services configuration, as described in the EIS, and that the proposed reconfiguration would better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

IG12-6

An integral element of the proposed reconfiguration is that eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before and now potentially hundreds of providers are available to eligible Veterans. This approach is seen as a way to improve overall quality and delivery of care. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IG12-6: See response above relating to options that provide care closer to home. See also group response in E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to distance travelled.

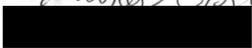
Commenter IG12: Gardner Gray

especially in light of the planned closure of Ft. Meade. Relying on the regional hospital is not viable due to the lack of experience in veterans' issues and the lack of facilities to handle another 8000 patients.)

If indeed you wish to do what you say, the only option is to return the Hot Springs campus to its former station at the top of VA facilities in the country.

Sincerely yours,

Gardner Gray

Gardner Gray

 Pringle, SD 57773



pg: I drove 4 hrs today to Ft Meade and back home near Hot Springs to receive and expense of a sonogram of my abdomen that took all best of minutes. This was scheduled at Ft Meade rather than Hot Springs. How is this one better at all more convenient? How is it better service? It probably is marked as a Ft Meade visit even though I live less than a half hour from Hot Springs. What you propose is the reverse of what is necessary.

IG12-7

IG12-8

IG12-7: See group response in E.3.3 of Appendix E relating to quality concerns associated with community provider care.

IG12 -8: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IG13: Terry Grosz

Commenter IG13: Terry Groz




COMMENT FORM

VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

NAME: Terry Groz	ADD TO MAILING LIST? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO
EMAIL ADDRESS: Groz	IF YES, I PREFER TO BE CONTACTED BY: <input type="checkbox"/> EMAIL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. POST OFFICE MAIL
ADDRESS: [REDACTED]	
CITY/STATE/ZIP: Alliance NE 69301	
ORGANIZATION (if any): Box Butte County RSVP/Handyman/Senior Center	
Comments: The reconfiguration affects many of our volunteers and clients. The days travel from Alliance, NE to Hot Springs, SD is already a full day. Adding two additional hours travel on the day is too much. The problem is that no one is working on a solution that will be a configuration that allows maximum service at Hot Springs. For example: how about taking all services proposed to Rapid City BUT arrange for Full services for one week each month in Hot Springs? <u>How about a compromise?</u>	
Thank you Terry Groz	

Comments must be postmarked or sent electronically by **February 5, 2016**.
 Email to vablackhillsfuture@va.gov.
 Postal mail to address on reverse.
 Online submission direct to EIS contractor at www.blackhillseis.com (with option to submit anonymously).

IG13-1: Quality cannot be compromised. While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, VA notes that outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2. In addition, eligible Veterans, including those in Nebraska, now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.

IG
13-1

Commenter IG14: Tom Geiser

Commenter IG14: Tom Geiser

Black Hills ETS Public Comment

#36



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Wednesday, January 27, 2016 6:45:07 PM
 Last Modified: Wednesday, January 27, 2016 6:48:42 PM
 Time Spent: 00:03:35
 IP Address: 69.77.216.2

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Tom Geiser
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	n/a
City/Town	Hot Springs
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57747
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

I am a veteran that uses the Hot Springs VA, and have for many years. The proposal to move the facility to Rapid City would personally affect me in several ways. First, the travel time to receive care would increase from 2 miles round trip to 120 miles. Even though the preferred alternative by the VA includes providing a CBOC that would only be for routine appointments which as an older veteran, most of the appointments would not be routine. Secondly, my property values would go down because of the number of employees that would have to leave as well as veterans that would need to move to be closer to the hospital. By losing several hundred high paying positions in a town this size would be devastating to the town and community. Less people would lead to less business, less competition and increased prices. In reviewing the DEIS, I believe there are many misleading things that drew them to their preferred alternative. First of all, the needs statement is what is driving this movement. The reason the VA has a hard time recruiting/retention is because nobody in their right mind would want to uproot their family to move to a job that has been threatened to be shut down for many years. If you are reading this, put yourself in their shoes. Would you take the chance of moving to a new location if you thought it was closing down in the next few years? It is expensive and traumatic for adults to move, let alone if you have children. This is not speculation. Interview your own employees. I personally know of 5 families that have moved in the past year because they believe that the VA will shut down in Hot Springs, so they wanted to get established in other locals before that happened. Pretty easy to confirm, just get the numbers from Human Resources. All the other points indirectly deal with money. Residential care, compliance, and treatment can be addressed with updating the existing facility. If the facility was in terrible disrepair, I could see where it might not be feasible to update it, but this facility is in very good shape. I understand that this facility has never failed an inspection. As a taxpayer, I would demand that there would be a minimum of 3 bids to update the existing facility. I have a hard time believing that it will cost \$98,414,236 more to update an existing hospital in good shape than to build a brand new one, and leasing

Duplicate letter to IG11. See responses to comments in IG11.

Commenter IG14: Tom Geiser

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

should not even be considered, just ask other Federal Agencies that have tried that. You have nothing at the end of the lease just like a car. Yep, you got into it cheaper than buying, but at the end of the lease, you have nothing. Before I made any decision on moving, I would get actual contractor bids from several companies, local and national to estimate the cost of upgrading the existing facility, not a Government estimate from engineers that haven't even seen the site. We already own the land and the building in Hot Springs. It is a National Treasure which means the Government must maintain it in some fashion anyway. Why not use that to our advantage and get additional federal funds designated for sites like this and help upgrade and maintain it?

The other needs are also not correct and based on speculation. The population center for the Hot Springs facility encompasses the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the Panhandle of Nebraska, parts of Wyoming, Southwestern South Dakota, and yes, Rapid City. The Save the VA committee has hard numbers showing the current numbers from these areas. Take that into consideration of the number of Veterans like myself that have had to go to Fort Meade for treatment because of the reduction of services at Hot Springs, and that number is even higher. I have had to go to Fort Meade on several occasions for things they used to be able to do in Hot Springs. Going to Rapid will be much further and more of a hardship for the Veterans living outside of Rapid. Your own Public meetings showed only one person that wanted it in Rapid compared to all of the other meetings you held across the Region who strongly supported not only leaving the facility in Hot Springs, but increasing the services. Future population centers? That is speculation. If we are going to speculate, how many people would use Hot Springs if it was expanded to a state of the art facility? Even if the figures the VA is using are correct, which I am certain they are not, as a taxpayer, I would much rather spend more money on an existing structure than we own, than line someone else's pockets for a lease. I work in a leased Government facility and have for 14 years. We are now looking at losing our lease when it comes up for renewal because our Agency has determined that the lease costs us too much to renew. Check with other Federal Agency's before you jump into a lease, they will have years of data for you to compare leasing to buying.

The purpose doesn't matter if there is no need for change. But for the sake of argument all of the stated purpose actions are met by upgrading the existing facility. By doing that, you will have a hospital that enhances and maintains quality and safety of care and is accessible, shorter travel for Veterans and is closer to the Veterans in the tristate area. Hot Springs has a brand new State Veterans Home. Why wouldn't you support it with a state of the art hospital in the same town and save many miles of commuting and shared services? You don't have to worry about what to do with a National Treasure designation, displacing Veterans and employees, what it will do to the local community of Hot Springs. You also won't have to deal with Congressional's fighting you all the way with the proposed alternative, because it is clear that they support what is best for the Veterans, and what have we heard is best for the Veterans FROM THE VETERANS?

In conclusion, I am sure if you look at the costs again and sharpen your pencils, you will see you underestimated the cost for a new facility (does the hospital in Denver ring a bell?) and that you have overestimated what it will cost to retrofit the existing facility. I also believe if you track down the number of Veterans in the tristate area that currently use Hot Springs and would use Hot Springs if services were improved, you will also find your initial numbers are significantly different. I also believe that if you canvassed the VA employees nationwide and let them know that the Hot Springs VA was being expanded with state of the art surgical/medical equipment and that it was going to be here another 100 years, with what Hot Springs has to offer, they would move here with no reservations.

Isn't the choice clear? The preferred alternative should be Alternative E, Save the VA. Do what is right for the Veterans, choose E.

Thank you.
/s/ Tom Geiser

Tom Geiser

Commenter IG15: Tom Geiser

Commenter IG15: Tom Geiser

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#31



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Wednesday, January 06, 2016 3:38:30 PM
 Last Modified: Wednesday, January 06, 2016 3:42:06 PM
 Time Spent: 00:03:36
 IP Address: 166.2.152.57

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Tom Geiser
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	none
City/Town	Hot Springs
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57747
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Same issued identified and addressed as in IG11.
 No additional response necessary.

Commenter IG15: Tom Geiser

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

I am a veteran who has been using the facility for many years, and my wife works there, so the proposal to move the services from Hot Springs would negatively affect us. I personally have been forced to wait long periods of time to receive appointments/treatments or been forced to go to Fort Meade for things that I used to be able to receive here such as dermatology appointments.

In reviewing the DEIS, I believe there are many misleading things that drew them to their preferred alternative. First of all, the needs statement is what is driving this movement.

The reason the VA has a hard time recruiting/retention is because nobody in their right mind would want to uproot their family to move to a job that has been threatened to be shut down for many years. If you are reading this, put yourself in their shoes. Would you take the chance of moving to a new location if you thought it was closing down in the next few years? It is expensive and traumatic for adults to move, let alone if you have children.

All the other points indirectly deal with money. Residential care, compliance, and treatment can be addressed with updating the existing facility. If the facility was in terrible disrepair, I could see where it might not be feasible to update it, but this facility is in very good shape. As a taxpayer, I would demand that there would be a minimum of 3 bids to update the existing facility. I have a hard time believing that it will cost \$98,414,236 more to update an existing hospital in good shape than to build a brand new one, and leasing should not even be considered, just ask other Federal Agencies that have tried that. You have nothing at the end of the lease just like a car. Yep, you got into it cheaper than buying, but at the end of the lease, you have nothing. I would also hope that the bids to update the existing facility would be reviewed by engineers/architects to ensure that we are comparing apples to apples with construction. In other words, the cost of a lavatory in the old hospital (if it even needs replaced) should be the same style/brand/cost as in the new hospital. If I was trying to skew the data in my favor like I think the VA is doing, I would show a toilet at the new hospital costing \$100 at Lowes and a designer Kohler toilet K-14247-FL-0 at the old hospital costing \$2,191.50 from Build.com.

The other needs are also not correct and based on speculation. The population center for the Hot Springs facility encompasses the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, the Panhandle of Nebraska, parts of Wyoming, Southwestern South Dakota, and yes, Rapid City. The Save the VA committee has hard numbers showing the current numbers from these areas. Take that into consideration of the number of Veterans like myself that have had to go to Fort Meade for treatment because of the reduction of services at Hot Springs, and that number is even higher. Going to Rapid will be much further and more of a hardship for the Veterans living outside of Rapid. Your own Public meetings showed only one person that wanted it in Rapid compared to all of the other meetings you held across the Region who strongly supported not only leaving the facility in Hot Springs, but increasing the services. Future population centers? That is speculation. If we are going to speculate, how many people would use Hot Springs if it was expanded to a state of the art facility?

The purpose doesn't matter if there is no need for change. But for the sake of argument all of the stated purpose actions are met by upgrading the existing facility. By doing that, you will have hospital that enhances and maintains quality and safety of care and is accessible, shorter travel for Veterans and is closer to the Veterans in the tristate area. You don't have to worry about what to do with a National Treasure designation, displacing Veterans and employees, what it will do to the local community of Hot Springs. You also won't have to deal with Congressional' s fighting you all the way with the proposed alternative, because it is clear that they support what is best for the Veterans, and what have we heard is best for the Veterans FROM THE VETERANS?

In conclusion, I am sure if you look at the costs again and sharpen your pencils, you will see you underestimated the cost for a new facility (does the hospital in Denver ring a bell?) and that you have overestimated what it will cost to retrofit the existing facility. I also believe if you track down the number of Veterans in the tristate area that currently use Hot Springs and would use Hot Springs if services were improved, you will also find your initial numbers are significantly different.

Isn't the choice clear? The preferred alternative should be Alternative E, Save the VA. Do what is right for the Veterans, choose E.

Thank you.
Tom Geiser

Commenter IG16: Robert Goldberg

Commenter IG16: Robert Goldberg

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#55



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
Started: Saturday, April 23, 2016 6:08:02 PM
Last Modified: Saturday, April 23, 2016 6:32:01 PM
Time Spent: 00:23:59
IP Address: 68.69.89.223

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Robert Goldberg
Address	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Hot Springs
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57747
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via U.S. Mail at the address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Commenter IG16: Robert Goldberg

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

The purpose of the proposed reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System is as follows:

- Increasing access to care closer to where Veterans reside
- Reducing out-of-pocket expenses for Veterans' travel
- Providing locations and facilities that support VA's efforts to enhance and maintain quality and safety of care in the 100,000 mile catchment area
- Ensuring facilities for Veterans receiving any services comply with accessibility requirements for handicapped individuals, support current standards of care, and can be well-maintained within available budgets and resources.

Alternative A, which is the VA's preferred alternative does not accomplish the stated purpose. The treatment programs based within the domiciliary (residential rehabilitation treatment program), typically serve veterans who come from long distances away (often from other states). Relocating the domiciliary to Rapid City does not bring the substance abuse and PTSD treatment programs closer to those veterans, since very few veterans from the Rapid City area seek domiciliary based treatment. Moreover, veterans with PTSD usually prefer a more rural environment for treatment. Thus, Hot Springs is a better fit for those seeking PTSD treatment than Rapid City. Rapid City also has more alcohol establishments and greater availability of street drugs than does Hot Springs, so Rapid City is a poorer fit for those veterans seeking substance abuse treatment than Hot Springs.

Veterans in western Nebraska, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, and the southern Black Hills would have increased travel expenses if they had to travel to Rapid City for medical care than could not be provided in what would be a small CBOC in Hot Springs if Alternative A is adopted.

Alternative A is also much more expensive for taxpayers in the long run than maintaining a full service medical center in Hot Springs. If Hot Springs is mothballed, it would cost a large sum of money over a 30 year period to maintain the Historic Buildings on the Hot Springs campus. No viable repurposing plan or arrangements have been made for the Historic buildings on the Hot Springs campus.

Alternative A would have a devastating socio-economic impact on the people of Fall River County and in the other communities of the southern Black Hills. Hundreds of jobs would be lost. Businesses would fail because of the reduced payroll dollars that circulate, and the loss of many jobs. The school system would be adversely impacted, as it would receive fewer dollars to operate. Property owners would be unable to sell their homes, or they would only be able to sell their homes at greatly reduced prices. There would be fewer tax dollars to support police and other vital services. In short, Alternative A, which is the VA's preferred alternative does not bring services closer to veterans, and it would have a devastating socio-economic impact on the Hot Springs and southern Black Hills region. Most current VA Black Hills employees who live in Hot Springs would have their jobs move to Sturgis or Rapid City, yet these employees would probably not be able to sell their houses in Hot Springs due to the socio-economic impact on the housing market in Hot Springs if Alternative A is adopted.

IG16-1: See group response in E.3.2 of Appendix E relating to ability of each alternative to meet purpose and need.

IG16-2: See group response in E.3.1 of Appendix E relating to concerns over increased travel for Veterans. One of the integral elements under all of the proposed reconfigurations is that eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live.

IG16-1

IG16-2

IG16-3

IG16-4

IG16-3: VA has committed to a long-term preservation plan that goes beyond the traditional mothballing protocols. The cost of the program is not known at this time because the program cannot be developed until after selection of an alternative. A full description of the long-term preservation plan is available in Section 5.2. [reuse]. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the cost of the alternatives (including mothballing costs).

IG16-4: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses See group responses in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the analysis of potential socioeconomic impacts and potential cumulative impacts on the local community.

Commenter IG17: Rafael Gomez

Commenter IG17: Rafael Gomez

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#10



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Thursday, October 29, 2015 8:03:47 PM
 Last Modified: Thursday, October 29, 2015 8:08:17 PM
 Time Spent: 00:04:29
 IP Address: 207.96.129.18

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Rafael Gomez
City/Town	Colorado Springs
State/Province	CO
ZIP/Postal Code	80921
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: *Respondent skipped this question*

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

Let the Vets Keep the Clinic at the Hot Springs they deserve it and earned the right to go there. I saw the VA rep on TV attempting to justify the new facility in Rapid City. She didn't make sense. Yes I am a vet.

IG
17-1

IG17-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs facility open.

VA notes that while the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2. In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IG18: Steve Griffin

Commenter IG18: Steve Griffin

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#22



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Tuesday, December 01, 2015 10:16:50 AM
 Last Modified: Tuesday, December 01, 2015 10:20:25 AM
 Time Spent: 00:03:35
 IP Address: 68.69.88.19

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Steve Griffin
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Custer
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57730
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

To whom it may concern,
 This proposed closing of the VA in Hot Springs, SD is really going to put an extra hardship on me and my family. It will only cause me and numerous other Veterans to travel farther and farther as we all age, which travel will only get harder and harder. The roads from Custer to Rapid City are often dangerous during the winter months which is very often snow/ice covered, not to mention the high number of deer on Rt 16 to Rapid. I've met numerous other Veterans over the present & past years who get their VA healthcare at the Hot Springs location, it's the only location within commutable distance, and they come from as far away as far Western WY, Pine Ridge & Rosebud, Lower Brule & Crow Creek Reservations Numerous small towns in rural SD, Colorado, Chadron, Alliance, Scottsbluff, and every little town in between in Nebraska to Hot Springs, SD.

It will also have one heck of an adverse effect of the little town of Hot Springs, both economically and long term viability of such a small community.

It's about time the VA think about it's Clients/Vets first. Not just about how to go about closing rural VA facilities that provide such great care to us who count on the VA in Hot Springs and in so many other rural communities in the states and locations listed.

STOP the Closing and any disruption of services to us Vets and our families in Rural South Dakota.

Respectfully Submitted

Duplicate letter as IG10. See response to comments in IG-10.

Commenter IH1: Kenneth Haden	
<p style="text-align: center;">Proposed Closure of VABHCS Hot Springs Campus Impact Statement</p> <p>I am a US Navy Vietnam veteran, property owner, small business owner and a retired VA employee. I am writing to you in regard to the proposed closure of the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Hot Springs SD.</p> <p>The closure of this facility would affect me in many ways.</p> <p>First, as a property owner in Fall River County and South Dakota, the closure of this facility would increase my real estate taxes. The impact of federal property payments in lieu of taxes would definitely affect the schools in Hot Springs. I have three grandchildren in the Hot Springs school system who would not have the full benefit of these payments to offset the cost of their education. Property values would decrease as jobs are eliminated in Fall River County.</p> <p>As a small business owner, my income and profit/loss depends on the population that is available to purchase my product. If that population is significantly affected, as it would be with the closure of the Hot Springs VA facility, the opportunity for me to continue to operate my business would diminish, and it is likely that I would lose my business.</p> <p>Prior to the merging of the Ft. Meade VA facility and the Hot Springs VA facility into the VA Black Hills Health Care System, the Hot Springs facility had a sound fiscal base and was meeting the needs of the veterans within the budgeted funds which were provided by the federal government. After the merger, the Hot Springs facility began to operate in the red as the Ft. Meade facility had done for years. The administration for VABHCS and VISN 23 have been systematically reducing the care offered at Hot Springs and moving those services to Ft. Meade. Vacant positions were not filled at Hot Springs or were opened as temporary appointments with very little benefits. This also created an atmosphere where employees were reluctant to accept positions at Hot Springs in fear that the facility would actually be closed.</p> <p>The current VA administration has indicated that they want to move the VA facilities to Rapid City. However, a very large part of the patient population at Hot Springs reside in western Nebraska and southwest Wyoming. The movement of services to Rapid City would increase the commute distance for these veterans by another 120 miles. I do not believe that adding distance for patients meets the current VA guidelines for providing timely and convenient patient care. Many of these veterans from Wyoming and Nebraska are elderly and in many instances the elderly wife is the one doing the driving. Having the patients on the highways for another two hours is certainly not in the best interest of good patient care or safety of our patients.</p> <p>It is a known fact that veterans suffering from PTSD have better treatment outcomes and a higher success rate at a facility in a rural environment. The Hot Springs VA facility has a domiciliary with a capacity of 200 patients but are utilizing only about 25% of those available beds. Veterans are requesting PTSD treatment at the Hot Springs facility but the shrinking of</p>	<p>IH1-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses. Potential socioeconomic impacts and impacts on community services (including property taxes and schools) are addressed in Sections 4.10 and 4.11 of the Final EIS. They have been revised to address potential impacts to the local community of Hot Springs.</p> <p>IH1-2: VA notes that past decisions relating to staffing levels and health care services are made by Veterans Health Administration professionals (leaders, planners and health care practitioners and professionals), based on a variety of factors, and are not subject to a NEPA review. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the past decline in services and the extent to which it has been considered in the Final EIS.</p> <p>IH1-3: While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs (and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2). In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals, urgent care, specialty services), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care. Only the RRTP is moving to Rapid City; also, the existing CBOC in Rapid City would be expanded to a MSOC to include additional specialty services.</p> <p>IH1-4: The Final EIS has been revised to include more rationale for relocating the Dom to Rapid City.</p>

Commenter IH1: Kenneth Haden

available beds and staff has created a backlog in the provision of this very critical treatment modality.

Patients who have in the past received their care at Hot Springs are being shuffled to Ft. Meade for critical life-saving preventive health procedures like colonoscopy or stress tests. Many of the procedures that are considered by the VA and the medical community at large to be critical for good health have been "moved" to Sturgis. This requires additional time, distance and expense for patients who need this very important care.

Please consider that the Hot Springs VA provides care for many of our Native American veterans who serve and have served this country proudly. Because of extreme shortage of trained medical professionals, the Indian Health Service has shifted all of the care for their veterans to the Veterans Health Administration. The removal of critical inpatient services and outpatient services for these veterans at the Hot Springs VA places them in an extremely difficult situation where health care is not available to them either through the Indian Health Service or the Veterans Health Administration. The removal of this local care represents another way that our nation has not met our responsibilities for the health care of our Native American veterans.

I humbly request that you consider all of the information that you will receive from individuals who know that the dismantling of the Hot Springs VA is not in the best interest of the veterans in Wyoming, Nebraska and South Dakota. We must continue to pursue excellence for our veterans. "To care for those who bore the Battle" is certainly our greatest calling. Freedom does not come without responsibility. The people of this great nation support our troops, and denying treatment through whatever means is unacceptable.



Kenneth Haden



Hot Springs, SD 57747

IH1-5

IH1-5: Native Americans would have the choice, under all the alternatives, to use either a VA or IHS system for their care as a result of a national Memorandum of Understanding that has been established between VA and Indian Health Service. They would also still be able to receive primary care through the new CBOC in Hot Springs. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

Commenter IH2: Derrick Hampton

Commenter IH2: Derrick Hampton

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Derrick Hampton

Address: _____

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: Do The VA keeps businesses in Hot Springs open and successful. Please keep services here in Hot Springs.

Purpose: _____

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature _____ Date _____

IH2-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing Hot Springs facility open and fully operational. Under the new preferred alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services would be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus.

IH2-1

Commenter IH3: Edward Harvey

Commenter IH3: Edward Harvey

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Edward F Harvey

Address: [Redacted] Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

EIS Section: Executive Summary

EIS Statement: Purpose

Comment:

Bullet 1 - Providing locations and facilities etc: Providing facilities in locations that are sensitive to the needs of the veterans in the catchment area is crucial to quality care. Native American veterans in this area have used the Hot Springs area as a sacred healing location for centuries and feel a sense of peace and comfort with this location. Conversely the Fort Meade location is connected with a historical massacre of their people, causing feelings of trepidation and even fear, which is not conducive to healing. Most veterans from a rural background are not comfortable in cities. The crowds and noise cause us to be nervous and on constant alert for threats. Again this is not an environment conducive to healing. The same also applies to veterans suffering from PTSD, recovery requires a stress free environment. I and many other veterans experience a feeling of peace from the soft warmth of the stone structures at Hot Springs. The sterile modern hospital structures are cold and uninviting adding an element of unease to any visit.

IH3-1

IH3-2

IH3-1: Native American traditional healing practices in the Black Hills are significant to those populations and to our understanding of American history. VA has identified the Battle Mountain Landform as a historic property within the APE. No Native American Tribes identified any traditional cultural properties on the site the of Hot Springs VA campus.

IH3-2 - Some health care services (outpatient primary care and some specialty care) would remain in Hot Springs under all of the alternatives. Under the new preferred alternative A-2, these services would be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. VA recognizes the larger urban setting of Rapid City may not be as inviting to many Veterans, however, VA believes that the advantages for residential treatment outweigh the concerns. Peaceful and serene settings will also be incorporated into facility design and selection of the site to the extent possible.

Commenter IH3: Edward Harvey	
<p>EIS Section: Executive summary</p> <p>EIS Statement: Need</p> <p>Comment:</p> <p>Bullet 1- Maintaining care at Hot Springs: The VA by it's inept management and misguided policies has produced a situation which can only result in failure to provide care at this facility. Fall River Health services has continued to attract quality doctors and nurses at a facility much smaller than the VA Hospital without the benefit packages associated with government service. Most rural facilities in this catchment area are able to maintain and attract quality staff. I am unaware of any lengthy record of patient injuries tied to unsafe conditions at this facility. Accessibility for the hospital section appears to be adequate as I routinely see veterans in wheelchairs receiving care without any issues. The PTSD program is only available for veterans who do not have mobility issues. As stated above these requirements have been law for over 40 years with no attempt by BHHCS management to correct any non-compliance issues.</p> <p>Bullet 2- Existing Facilities constrain care, services and access: Services have been systematically reduced by BHHCS management due to policies, not due to lack of adequate space or equipment. Actually services have been terminated and the equipment moved to Fort Meade in more than one instance. Radiological services comes to mind. A facility in and of itself does not reduce quality of care. The appearance of a building can be warm and inviting or cold and impersonal. Most new construction is by design cold and impersonal. A well maintained older building has character and warmth with an aura of solidity. Many older facilities have proud traditions of quality personalized care and long histories of positive treatment for area veterans. This is another intangible ingredient of quality care, enhancing veteran trust in the care received.</p>	<p>IH3-6: VA's challenges with staff recruitment have been clearly laid out in Chapter 1 of the EIS. An integral component of the proposed reconfiguration is greater reliance on local community providers. Eligible Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.</p> <p>IH3-7: VA notes that past decisions relating to staffing levels and health care services are made by Veterans Health Administration professionals (leaders, planners and health care practitioners and professionals), based on a variety of factors, and are not subject to a NEPA review. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the past decline in services and the extent to which it has been considered in the Final EIS.</p>

Commenter IH3: Edward Harvey

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I Edward F Harvey give permission/authorization for Save The VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

 26 JAN 2016
Signature Date

Commenter IH4: Edward Harvey

Commenter IH4: Edward Harvey

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Edward F. Harvey

Address: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

EIS Section: Executive Summary

EIS Statement: Purpose –Bullet 1

Maintain quality care in the catchment area

Comment: In the last week a veteran (Jim) went to BHHCS for treatment. He was advised that he needed immediate heart bypass surgery to prevent a fatal heart attack. Next he was advised that the waiting list had a 5 month wait time for him. On advice from friends he contacted our congressional representative and two days later was given a voucher for treatment, by the BHHCS, at Rapid Regional. He is presently in the hospital awaiting quadruple bypass surgery tomorrow. This real scenario only points out the need for restoring the Hot Springs Facility to it's former full service status. This system is broken due to inept management. How many veterans like Jim do not contact congress to receive their benefits. Rather they go home and hope they will not die before their turn on the waiting list comes up. What veterans need is care that is responsive to their needs. Existing facilities need to be upgraded to provide needed services and procedures need to be changed to provide timely response to care needs. Whatever system was used for Jim should be the norm, not Veterans Choice or other extended wait avenues and not requiring contacting congressional representatives to obtain timely care. The purpose can only be achieved by restoring existing facilities to full service status and implementing system changes that provide for immediate care at non VA facilities when care cannot be provided on site.

IH4-1

IH4-1: Thank you for sharing your story. VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow VA to better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. Eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before. This should help reduce wait times and provide more options for health care treatment for Veterans.

Commenter IH4: Edward Harvey

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I Edward F. Harvey give permission/authorization for SAVE the VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

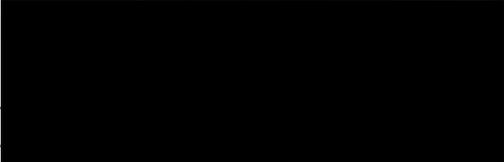
Edward F. Harvey Signature 17 Feb 16 Date

Commenter IH5: Ruth Haynie

Commenter IH5: Ruth Haynie

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Ruth J. Haynie

Address: 

Hot Springs,
SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: We need to keep the VA open in Hot Springs. Many people moved here and bought property + started businesses to be near the VA. If it is closed, it will kill the town AND the businesses, and it will destroy property value. No one will be able to sell their homes. It will cause a loss of jobs for youth + adults, not only at the VA, but in the town in general. The Bible Purpose: INSTITUTE STUDENTS WILL BE UNABLE TO GET WORK ALSO. Please keep the VA open. People will have to go to RAPID CITY FOR ALL BASIC NECESSITIES IF THIS TOWN loses its businesses.

I, Ruth J. Haynie give permission/authorization for Lyn Bentson to enter this information online on my behalf.

Ruth J. Haynie Signature January 23, 2016 Date

IH5-1

IH5-1: VA recognizes the potential for adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and has expanded Sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16 of the Final EIS to address impacts on the local economy and community services of Hot springs.

VA acknowledges your support to keep the Hot Springs VAMC open and notes that under the new preferred alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services would be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. In addition, a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus; it would bring up to 120 jobs to the area which should also help address potential economic concerns.

Commenter IH6: Clifford Heizen

Commenter IH6: Clifford Heinzen

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: CLIFFORD H. HEINZEN

Address: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 12311

Need: You say the problem is recruiting & maintaining qualified staff. It is no more difficult than our local hospital & clinics. Over the years the director of the hospital eliminated services or moved services to Ft Meade which eliminated services of qualified staff here. They also did not replace retiring staff. It was a sneaky way to eliminate services, the remaining have have done an amazing job to provide services for the vets, even after all these cuts.

Purpose: is to provide quality care to Vets who served this country & deserve the wonderful care that has been provided by the Hot Spgs. campus for many years. If our VA Hospital is closed we will have to travel 60 miles to Rapid City or 85 miles to Ft Meade. As our Vets age it will become more & more difficult & our local hospital & clinics may not be able to handle that increase of patients.

CLIFFORD HEINZEN give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Clifford Heinzen Signature 1-31-2016 Date

IH6-1: Past decisions relating to staffing levels and health care services are made by Veterans Health Administration professionals (leaders, planners and health care practitioners and professionals), based on a variety of factors, and are not subject to a NEPA review. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the past decline in services and the extent to which it has been considered in the Final EIS

IH6-1

IH6-2: While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care, and section E.3.1 in Appendix E relating to the distance Veterans travel.

IH6-2

Commenter IH7: Virginia Heinzen

Commenter IH7: Virginia Heinzen

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Virginia M Heinzen
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section 7.10.2.3

Need: I need you to leave the Hot Spgs VA where it is. We bought our home here & the main reason was because the VA is 6 blocks from our home. My husband is a Vet & he has used this VA campus since we moved here 19 yrs ago. Sadly services have been cut & yet has continued to do the best they can despite all the cuts that have occurred. What a shame!!

Purpose: Closing the VA in Hot Springs will impact us personally because the taxes we pay & others in the community. There will be fewer tax dollars for our community.
Just because of the greedy, cuts & stupid decisions of people who do not live here everyone here will suffer. SHAME!
Our property value will drop. SHAME!
If you are trying to destroy a wonderful town you are doing a good job of it!

Virginia Heinzen give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Virginia Heinzen Signature 1-29-16 Date

IH7-1

IH7-1: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing Hot Springs facility open and fully operational and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, VA notes that outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2. In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IH7-2

IH7-2: VA recognizes the potential for adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and has expanded Sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16 of the Final EIS to address impacts on the local economy and community services of Hot springs.

Commenter IH8: Robert Heiser

Commenter IH8: Robert Heiser

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Robert D. Heiser
 Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, S. Dak. 57447
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3 10 2 3

Need: By losing the employees and people coming here for services Hot Springs housing will really suffer.

Purpose: Keep the population up, so don't lose businesses, school, tax base.

I _____ give permission/authorization for Mary Helen Pedron to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Robert D. Heiser Date 2-20-2015

IH8-1

IH8-1: Section 4.11 of the EIS addresses potential impacts on housing.

A new development since the Draft EIS came out is that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area. Though this call center is not related to the proposed reconfiguration of healthcare services, it is an example of the types of adaptive reuses available for the Hot Springs campus in the event a decision is made to vacate the campus. The call center jobs would also help address potential economic concerns.

Commenter IH9: Larry Herman

Commenter IH9: Larry Herman

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Larry Herman

Address: [Redacted] Rapid City, SD 57702

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

EIS Section: 2.3.5

EIS Statement: Alternative E-Save the VA Proposal

Comment: My main concern is the veterans that have to travel so far for services if the BHHCS closes. The Native Americans have a problem getting from Pine Ridge Reservation to Hot Springs now. What will they do if the BHHCS closes and they must travel further?

You asked the Veterans to tell you what they wanted....We Did....Please listen!

Let's implement the Save The VA Proposal

EIS Section:

EIS Statement:

Comment:

IH9-1: Native Americans would have the choice, under all the alternatives, to use either a VA or IHS system for their care as a result of a national Memorandum of Understanding that has been established between VA and Indian Health Service. They would also still be able to receive primary care through the new CBOC in Hot Springs. See group responses in Section E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care, respectively.

IH9-1

IH9-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IH9-2

Commenter IH9: Larry Herman

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I Larry Herman give permission/authorization for Save The VA to enter this information online on my behalf.

Larry Herman 2/20/16
Signature Date

Commenter IH10: Mary Houwman

Commenter IH10: Mary Houwman

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Mary Houwman
 Address: [Redacted]
Old S.D. 57766
 Phone: [Redacted]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 3.10.2.6 VA Employment

Need: The VA employs 357 FTEE's. If the VA closes we will have less business in town because the VA employees will move & not spend their money in town. I have noticed this over the last 5 years. The business have move

Purpose: out & we because everybody thinks the VA will close. many of the VA employees have already left. the VA is the largest employer in Hot Springs by far the next is the schools with far less employees.

We need the VA in Hot Springs
2.3.5. Alternative E Save the VA Proposal

I, Mary Houwman give permission/authorization for Sarah Petru enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Mary Houwman Date: 2-20-16

IH
10-1

IH10-1: VA recognizes the potential for adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and has expanded Sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16 of the Final EIS to address impacts on the local economy and community services of Hot springs.

A new development since the Draft EIS came out is that a new national VHA call center has recently been proposed to operate on the existing Hot Springs campus and would bring up to 120 jobs to the area. Though this call center is not related to the proposed reconfiguration of healthcare services, it is an example of the types of adaptive reuses available for the Hot Springs campus in the event a decision is made to vacate the campus. The call center jobs would also help address potential economic concerns.

IH
10-2:

IH10-2: IH9-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IH11: Joanne Hairy Shirt

Commenter IH11: Joanne Hairy Shirt

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Joanne Hairy Shirt
Address: [Redacted] Pine Ridge SD 57707
Phone: [Redacted]
e-mail: [Redacted]
EIS Section: [Redacted]

EIS Statement: _____

Comment:
Please keep the Hot Springs VA open to
serve our rural veterans. Many
travel hundreds of miles to get
to Hot Springs for healthcare.
lets keep them getting services
without adding more miles.

IH
11-1

EIS Section: 235, Alternative E Save the
EIS Statement: VA Plan

Comment: _____

IH11-1: IH9-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter IH11: Joanne Hairy Shirt

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

I Joanne Hairy Shirt give permission/authorization for Sam Parker
enter this information online on my behalf.

Joanne Hairy Shirt 6/1/16
Signature Date

Commenter IH12: Emmett Hale

Commenter IH12: Emmett Hale

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, April 12, 2016 4:20 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Closing Hotsprings VA

From: Emmett Hale [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 10:19 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Closing Hotsprings VA

Hi,

I hope the VA keeps Hotsprings open. I have been in the hospital there and had great care and they got me fixed up fine.

Since I live 17 miles SW of Crawford, NE I have a ways to go for medical care where ever I go, but Hotsprings is closer than Rapid City or Ft. Meade. I have already refused to go to Ft. Meade for tests that I thought Hotsprings could do if they would.

Anyway, I am for keeping the Hotsprings VA open and upgrading it if it needs it.
Emmett Hale

I served in the Navy from '59 to '63

IH12-1: We appreciate your service and note that under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Eligible Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance Veterans travel and purchased care option and quality of care.

IH
12-1

Commenter IH13: Ed Harvey

Commenter IH13: Ed Harvey

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 29, 2015 11:44 AM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Draft EIS statement response
Attachments: COMMENTS ON VABHHCS EIS 1406.docx

From: ED HARVEY [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, December 17, 2015 11:01 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Draft EIS statement response

please acknowledge receipt

Commenter IH13: Ed Harvey	
<p style="text-align: center;">COMMENTS ON VABHCS EIS 1406</p> <p>1.2.1 Statement of purpose and need includes increasing access to care closer to where veterans reside and reducing out of pocket expenses for veteran travel. Requiring rural veterans to travel to Fort Meade for medical care adds over 100 miles one way from Hot Springs. Thus your proposal increases cost and places services farther from patient residences.</p> <p>1.2.2.2.1 Exhibit 1 Low usage at the Hot Springs Facility. According to your figures Hot Springs has more registered Patients than Rapid City and 4 times the patient encounters as rapid city. 123,000+ patient encounters per year is not significantly lower than the numbers for other BHHCS campuses. Had the VA not reduced services at Hot Springs, forcing veterans to travel to rapid city or Ft Meade for needed services, these numbers would further show the importance of having a rural facility in this area. I also question the patient numbers given in exhibit 1, during Mr Distasio's tenure I received notice that I was now a registered patient at Ft Meade, 5 of my veteran neighbors also received this notice. I was able to correct this, however I question how many veterans in BHHCS expended the effort to correct their status. How were patient locations verified as this situation seems to be another attempt by BHHCS administration to falsify information to confirm their agenda, much the same as false waiting lists. Also no study is shown which addresses the ability of Fort Meade to absorb the increased patient load should Hot Springs be closed.</p> <p>1.2.2 Lack of ability to recruit and maintain clinical competency of staff. I find it amazing that small rural hospitals are able to recruit and maintain staff in the BHHCS catchment area, where a major national program such as the VA CAN'T. A study needs to be done comparing recruitment ads by small hospitals with similar ads by BHHCS administration. Veterans would be better served by first recruiting competent managers from small rural hospitals who have proven abilities to maintain staffing to replace current managers who have demonstrated their lack of ability. Actually if the VA were to coordinate with medicare etc. and provide full service rural hospitals it would not only benefit veterans but would be beneficial to all rural citizens. This concept could be called Vision for Rural Americas future section 1.2.1.</p> <p>1.2.2.1.2 Non compliance with 42U.S.C 4151. THIS LAW(Architectural Barriers Act) WAS PASSED IN 1968. Any government facility which does not comply today, has been out of compliance for approximately 47 YEARS. I believe this should constitute gross negligence on the part of any managing agency. Using this as an issue to close a facility constitutes a cover up of past negligence as does any citing of neglected system maintenance. Assuming these issues have not adversely impacted use of this facility for this extended length of time why are they now an issue. This section neglects to consider the whole law, as provisions are made for acceptable partial compliance. Also no mention is made of repurposing medical sections into office space or storage in newly renovated compliant sections of the Hot Springs campus, clearly not an example of directing funds into patient care. No mention is made of other BHHCS facilities and their needs for renovation as a comparison. Any newly constructed facility would most probably suffer the same neglect from this agency.</p>	<p>IH 13-1</p> <p>IH 13-2</p> <p>IH13- 3</p> <p>IH13- 4</p> <p>IH13-1: Under the preferred Alternative A-2, outpatient primary care services and some limited specialty services will still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus. Eligible Veterans also now have more options for care from community providers, at VA expense, closer to where they live to help reduce distance Veterans have to travel. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and purchased care option and quality of care.</p> <p>IH13-2: VA used the most up-to-date population information available. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volumes and services. Exhibit 1 in Chapter 1 has been updated and expanded to include more current Veteran population data. However, VA is unable to update the cost information provided in the EIS due to current appropriation restrictions.</p> <p>IH13-3: Chapter 1 discusses the many challenges VA faces in recruiting staff.</p> <p>IH13-4: VA has revised statements in the Final EIS about the suitability of the historic buildings to comply with the ABA (see added discussion to Section 2.2 relating to each alternative's ability to purpose and need. See also related group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E.</p>

Commenter IH13: Ed Harvey	
<p>1.2.2.1.4 Cost per Unique Patient. This cost analysis has several problems. First the number of Unique Patients at each facility has not been verified by an independent audit of records in conjunction with patient interviews. Secondly simply dividing facility costs by patient population is a misuse of statistics, skewing true cost in favor of populations with fewer medical needs. Cost per patient visit would be closer, however even this would give a false result, skewed in favor of facilities providing more simple procedures. No comparison to costs for continued upkeep of a properly maintained historical facility versus a modern facility has been provided, probably due to the lack of a properly maintained facility for comparison. Once again past mismanagement does not justify additional costs now. The assertion that infrastructure diverts funds from direct patient care is a non-issue. This is a cost associated with owning facilities on federally owned property, which is offset by not paying local taxes. Agreements could be made with local entities to share many of these services. Moving toward replacing older facilities with newer more modern facilities is at best only a short term solution. Presently these newer facilities have a projected service life of only 30 years. This will divert many billions of care dollars from patient care into construction of modern facilities. As an example of this diversion of funds, one only need look at the present case of the new modern facility in Denver. A verifiable comparison of costs associated with new construction versus competent renovation must be included in any long term cost analysis. Changes in healthcare delivery are occurring faster than existing facilities can adapt. No verifiable explanation is given to address how a newly constructed facility magically can accommodate future structural needs not yet identified or why an existing facility cannot.</p> <p>1.2.2.2.1 How can low usage be justified when 189,000+ encounters were outsourced in FY 2014. Has an analysis been performed to trend this usage of non-VA facilities. Has an analysis been performed to compare the cost of outsourcing to equivalent cost in a functional VA facility. The 2010 designation of the Hot Springs VAMC is no longer supported due to inept administration. Unavailability of local postoperative care is not a viable concern. Many rural residents routinely are sent home after outpatient surgery. Assuming adequate staff to perform more invasive procedures, the staff would be local residents available on call similar to any other medical facility. Specialists such as orthopedic surgeons could be shared with other area institutions as is presently done at the FALL RIVER facility.</p> <p>1.3 It is beyond the scope of this EIS to determine Specific Health Care Services at any location. Although not within the scope, requirements regarding appropriate buildings and infrastructure are the focus of this EIS. How does one focus on scenarios which are not within the scope of an investigation? VA projections are almost as reliable as VA waiting lists or cost estimates for new construction. Basing an EIS on what if scenarios has no relation to reality.</p> <p>1.4 NHPA The VA has a long and documented history of neglecting Historic properties. Historic abandonment of Landmark facilities is counter to Executive order No. 13006. Where is the data documenting the yearly cost of maintaining this landmark facility as required by NHPA.</p>	<p>IH 13-5</p> <p>IH 13-6</p> <p>IH 13-7</p> <p>IH 13-8</p>
	<p>IH13-5: Thank you for your comment. The discussion was not meant to include a comprehensive and detailed accounting and cost comparison between major facilities within the VA BHHCS. It is to show that operating two older facilities with duplicative services is not efficient.</p> <p>IH13-6: The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volumes and services. VA has analyzed the most up-to-date data and it helps support VA's ongoing concerns about our ability to maintain safe and quality health care services at the Hot Springs campus in its current configuration. VA is unable to provide all services required at every VA location. VA partners with community providers to procure services not offered by VA and/or care closer to where Veterans live.</p> <p>IH13-7: As stated in the EIS, decisions about specific health care services that VA offers to Veterans at any location are decisions made by Veterans Health Administration professionals (leaders, planners and health care practitioners and professionals), to further VA's mission to provide exceptional health care that improves Veterans' health and well being. Such decisions are not subject to a NEPA review. This EIS analyzed impacts from the alternatives for constructing and operating the physical facilities from which health care services are offered.</p> <p>IH13-8: The NHPA does not require disclosure of yearly maintenance costs. See Table 1-4 in the EIS for the 30-year costs of operating the Hot Springs VA campus.</p>

Commenter IH13: Ed Harvey	
<p>2.2 Veterans Choice Program: This program has proven to be less efficient than regular VA wait lists, at an administrative cost of 1 BILLION+ dollars per year for the present contract. The inflated projected cost of a full service hospital at Hot Springs would be 26 million dollars per year for 30 years with a probability of immediate medical care for area veterans. How does this constitute good stewardship of veteran care dollars and who gets the retention bonus? Executive order 11593 was not implemented by BHHCS or the VA, this was accomplished by local efforts overcoming BHHCS resistance. 2.3.1.1.1 Hot Springs CBOC If the goal is to build a new structure, why would it be prudent to purchase 5 acres when we already have a site with over 70 acres which has available city water and sewer. These services are not presently available outside the city limits. Given that no firm plan exists for this proposal no verifiable estimate of short or long term costs can be determined. Given the best case scenario of historic VA estimates being off by 66% the numbers in table 2-3 are woefully low. Do these 30 year cost projections include property taxes, salaries, infrastructure maintenance and projected modifications to remain up to date with evolving medical needs? How does a part time CBOC enhance veteran care over a 24 hour hospital with an emergency room. Given the VA history of closing rural CBOC facilities what assurances will be given for long term availability of this proposed facility? Rapid city facilities cost estimates have the same lack of credibility as the CBOC. Given the projected number of FTE's (approximately 290) at a modest average of 30,000/year the cost for salaries alone (without benefits) is over \$260,000,000 for the 30 year period. Almost double the projected 30 year cost, without any money for facilities. In summary the PURPOSE of this EIS should be restated as, another attempt by the VA and BHHCS to cover up decades of mismanagement and neglect of facilities placed under their care while obtaining maximum retention bonuses for inept managers. Their preferred alternative has no basis in fact and does not even have a clear direction or goal. In all my years of making proposals for funding to the government, and preparing EIS documents, this is the worst example I have encountered.</p> <p>EDWARD F. HARVEY</p>	<p>IH 13-9</p> <p>IH 13-10</p> <p>IH13-9: See group response E.3.3 in this Appendix relating to criticisms and role of the Veterans Choice Program in the proposed reconfiguration. Section 2.2 of the Final EIS has also been revised to clarify the purchased care (now referred to as Care in the Community) element of the proposed reconfiguration under all of the alternatives.</p> <p>IH13-10: After additional examination and review of comments on the Draft EIS, VA has selected a new preferred alternative that will allow VA to maintain a presence on the Hot Springs campus. Under the new preferred alternative A-2, primary care services and some limited specialty services would be provided in a renovated Building 12 on the existing campus.</p>

Commenter IH14: Juanita Holley

Commenter IH14: Juanita Holley

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 5:29 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Alternative E

-----Original Message
From: Juanita Holley [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, March 01, 2016 11:42 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Alternative E

My husband is a 100% disabled Vietnam Veteran due to [REDACTED]. We recently moved to Hot Springs to be near a VA Hospital that specializes in [REDACTED] patients. Going to a big city, i.e. Rapid City, brings on anxiety attacks.

Why would you place our Veterans into a situation that brings on anxiety attacks just to save some money. Haven't our Veterans already given enough of themselves to not have to keep paying by being placed into a situation that brings on anxiety?

Select Alternative "E" and repay our veterans for all that they have sacrificed for our freedom.

Juanita Holley
Hot Springs

IH14-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IH
14-1

Commenter IH15: Matt Hubner

Commenter IH15: Matt Hubner

IH15-1: The comment period was actually extended multiple times and officially ended on June 20, 2016.

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, December 29, 2015 11:45 AM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Confirmation of comment deadline

From: Hubner, Matt [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 21, 2015 2:52 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Confirmation of comment deadline

Hi Luke,

I'm the lead NEPA reviewer for EPA Region 8 for this project. I just wanted to get confirmation that the comment deadline has been extended to February 5, 2016? Our tracking system still indicates the deadline is January 5, 2016, but I noticed all the online deadlines have shifted.

IH
15-1

Thanks for your assistance.

Happy Holidays,

Matt Hubner
NEPA Reviewer
Region 8
[REDACTED]

Commenter IH16: Perry Holmes

Commenter IH16: Perry Holmes



COMMENT FORM



VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

NAME: <i>Perry Holmes</i>		ADD TO MAILING LIST? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
EMAIL ADDRESS: [REDACTED]		IF YES, I PREFER TO BE CONTACTED BY: <input type="checkbox"/> EMAIL <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. POST OFFICE MAIL
STREET ADDRESS: [REDACTED] <i>Hot Springs SD</i>		
CITY/STATE/ZIP:		
ORGANIZATION (if any): <i>Tax Payer</i>		
Comments:		
<i>Closing the VA in Hot Springs SD will cost more than you will save. Building in Rapid City will cost more than keep the VA in Hot Springs running for years.</i>		
<i>Vet should receive the best care for the best cost!</i>		

IH16-1: Thank you for your comment. VA agrees that Veterans need the best care available and believes the proposed reconfiguration will provide the safe and quality care to meet the current and future health care needs of Veterans. Chapter 2 of the Final EIS provides an additional breakout of costs for each alternative.

IH
16-1

Comments must be postmarked or sent electronically by **February 5, 2016**.
Email to yablackhillfuture@va.gov.
Postal mail to address on reverse.
Online submission direct to EIS contractor at www.blackhillseis.com (with option to submit anonymously).

Commenter IH17: Edward Harvey

Commenter IH17: Edward Harvey

Duplicate of comments and responses in IH13-1 through IH13-4 above.

COMMENTS ON VABHHCS EIS 1406

1.2.1 Statement of purpose and need includes increasing access to care closer to where veterans reside and reducing out of pocket expenses for veteran travel. Requiring rural veterans to travel to Fort Meade for medical care adds over 100 miles one way from Hot Springs. Thus your proposal increases cost and places services farther from residences.

1.2.2.1 Exhibit 1 Low usage at the Hot Springs Facility. According to your figures Hot Springs has more registered Patients than Rapid City and 4 times the patient encounters as rapid city. Had the VA not reduced services at Hot Springs these numbers would further show the importance of having a rural facility in this area. Also no study is shown which addresses the ability of Fort Meade to absorb the increased patient load should Hot Springs be closed.

1.2.2 Lack of ability to maintain recruit and maintain clinical competency of staff. I find it amazing that small rural hospitals are able to recruit and maintain staff where a major national program such as the VA CAN'T. Perhaps veterans would be better served by first recruiting competent managers from small rural hospitals who have proven abilities to maintain staffing. Actually if the VA were to coordinate with medicare etc. and provide full service rural hospitals it would not only benefit veterans but would be beneficial to all rural citizens. This concept could be called vision for the future section 1.2.1.

1.2.2.1.2 Non compliance with 42U.S.C 4151. THIS LAW WAS PASSED IN 1968. Any government facility which does not comply today has been out of compliance for approximately 47 YEARS. I believe this should constitute gross negligence on the part of any managing agency. Using this as an issue to close a facility constitutes a cover up of past negligence as does any citing of neglected system maintenance. Any newly constructed facility would most probably suffer the same neglect from this agency.

EDWARD F. HARVEY



Commenter IH18: Doug Harvey

Commenter IH18: Doug Harvey

From: Doug [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, November 2, 2015 1:31 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future

Hi come it isn't for all veterans instead of just a few

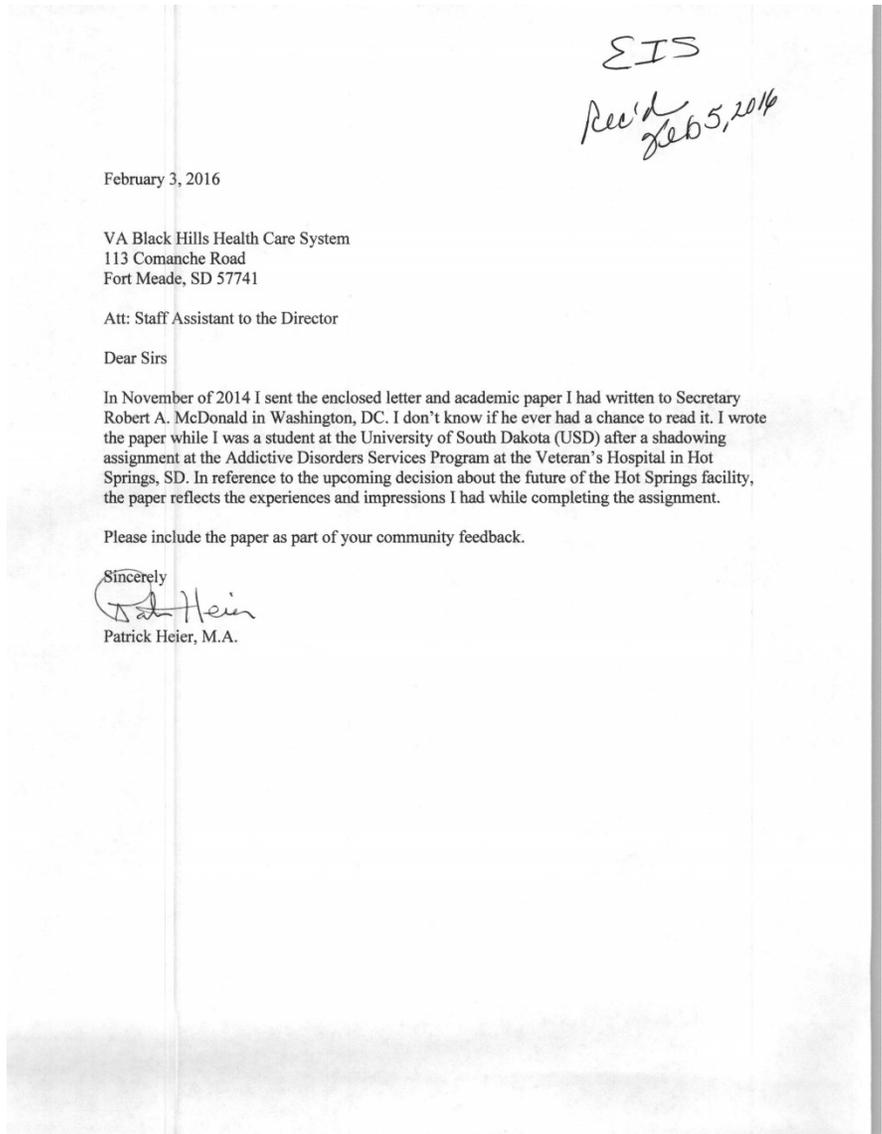
Sent from my Verizon Wireless 4G LTE DROID

IH
18-1

IH18-1: The proposed reconfiguration was developed to ensure safety and quality of care to all Veterans in the BHHCS service area.

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier



IH19-1: Thank you for sharing your paper on your experience and impressions of the Hot Springs campus. It is included in its entirety with your comment and being made part of the public record for this EIS - for all to read and share in your discoveries. VA is proud of the Hot Springs medical center's excellent record of care and service provided to our Veterans.

Reasons why the VA proposes to relocate the residential treatment program to Rapid City are discussed in more detail in Section 1.2.2.3 of the Final EIS.

IH
19-1

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier

November 11, 2014

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Att: Secretary Robert A. McDonald

810 Vermont Ave. NW

Washington, DC 20420

Dear Sir;

When I was studying for certification as a Substance Abuse Counselor at the University of South Dakota I had a "shadowing assignment" at the Addictive Disorders Services Program at the Veteran's Hospital in Hot Springs, South Dakota. I spent two days there and attended staff meetings, interviewed staff, and observed programs. I was extremely impressed with the dedication of the staff, the high quality and comprehensive programming, and the overall positive and healing environment (milieu). The facility was spacious, well maintained and set in the natural beauty of the southern Black Hills.

I wanted to share this paper with you to add my support for keeping the VA Program and facility in Hot Springs. The physical plant is a national treasure, the treatment program is exceptional, and the community is dependent on and deeply respectful and supportive of the veterans. Overall, it is "An Oasis of Healing" and precious resource for our veterans.

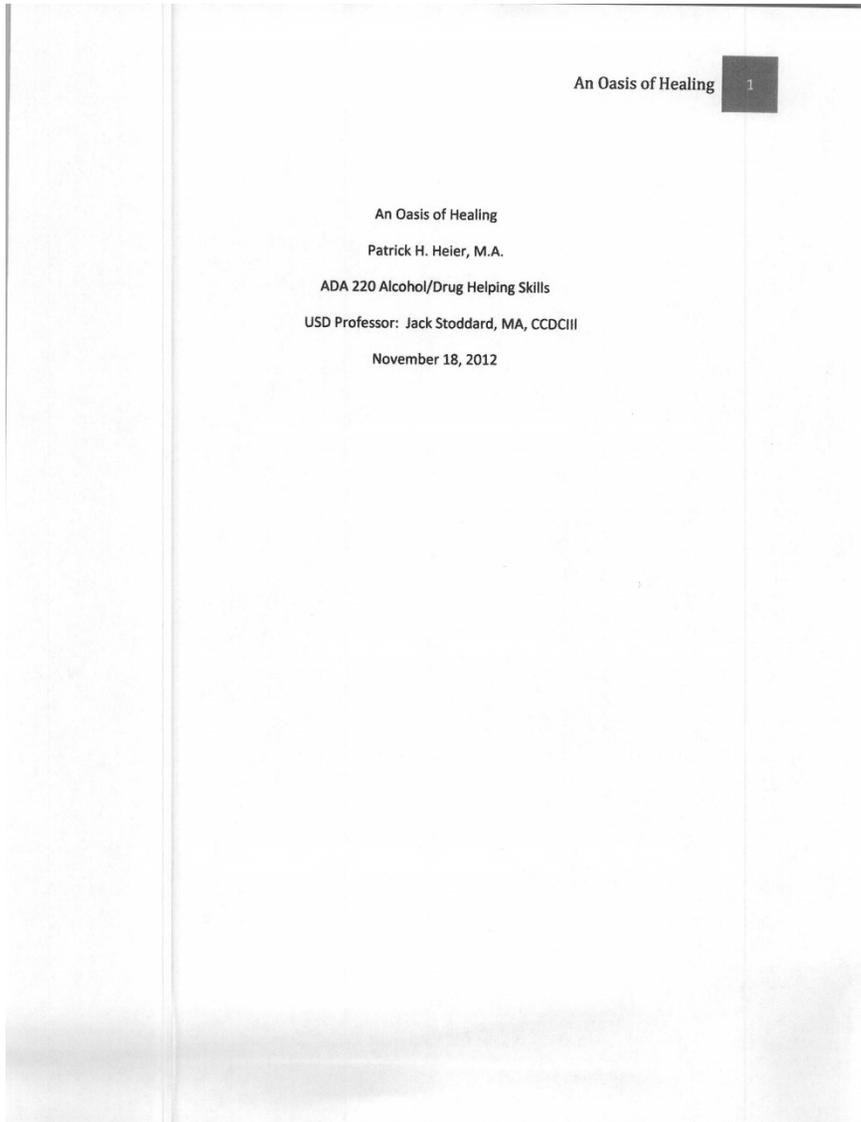
Sincerely,



Patrick Henry Heier, M.A.

[REDACTED]
Hosmer, SD 57448
[REDACTED]

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier



Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier

An Oasis of Healing 2

Abstract

My shadowing experience was at the Hot Springs campus of the VA Black Hills Health Care System. The hospital is located in a beautiful former tuberculosis hospital in the Southern Black Hills about sixty miles south of Rapid City. The treatment program is both "holistic and interpersonal in nature" (ADS Program Guide). The program services six states with an average age of 47, of which approximately 24% are Native Americans.

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier

An Oasis of Healing 3

The factors that inspired me to call the Hot Springs VA Hospital an "Oasis of Healing" was a combination of the physical plant, the professional and well-organized treatment program, and the overall feeling, -a positive 'milieu' atmosphere surrounding the facility, the people working there and the veterans themselves.

The physical plant was first built to serve as a tuberculosis sanitarium and was converted to a veteran's home and hospital in 1889. The hospital is located on top of a scenic hill with plenty of fresh air. The building has high ceilings and many large windows for ample air circulation. The center of the hospital is a round courtyard with a fountain in the center. The offices and hospital facilities are situated in a circular manner around the courtyard, and spoke-like dormitories protrude out from the circle almost like spokes in a wheel. The VA Hospital is a designated National Historical Site.

Description of Treatment Program

The Hot Springs campus of the VA Black Hills Health Care System treatment program consists of the Addictive Disorders Services (ADS) and Intensive Residential Treatment (IRT), as well as Intermediate Residential Care (IRC). The ADS program is modeled after 12-step recovery traditions. ADS consists of a maximum of seven weeks, which can include of a combination of IRT and IRC or all of one or all of the other depending on the individual needs of the veterans. Extension of the seven week limit is possible if determined necessary by the treatment team (ADS Program Guide).

IRT has 36 treatment openings for both male and female veterans, as well as an outpatient treatment component for veterans living in the community. It has an educational component which concentrates on the process of addiction and recovery and includes classes, focus groups, 12-step recovery structure, and individual counseling sessions. IRT veteran participants must attend a minimum of five addiction therapy groups a week, and nine psycho-educational groups. There are also ten special focused group therapy sessions based on individually assessed needs. Participants must meet once a week with a care coordinator and with an addiction therapist for orientation and sign an ADS treatment contract. They must become acquainted with expectations of the program, attendance requirements, and "journaling on a minimum of three sobriety focused support activities" (ADS Program Guide).

The IRC "is a semi-structured residential environment fostering continued addiction free lifestyle through therapeutic programming to develop life skills to live a clean and sober lifestyle". The program emphasizes developing sobriety maintenance skills through weekly meetings with a care coordinator and a primary therapist, attendance of four primary group therapy sessions "focused on living sober skills and other general aftercare issues including Life Skills group therapy weekly". Participants will sign an ADS treatment contract and will attend and journal a minimum of three sobriety focused support activities per week". Other psycho-educational classes and individual and group therapy are available if necessary (ADS Program Guide).

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier

An Oasis of Healing 4

Program Philosophy

Recovery is a lifetime process of growth in sobriety. Responsibility for recovery belongs to the individual and often involves changing one's lifestyle, goals, attitudes, values and beliefs. It is a process in which relapse is common, therefore, most individuals in recovery need a strong support system including spiritual, family, social and possibly medical and/or mental health treatment. Recovery is a process of inner discovery and of progress towards the attainment of health and serenity.

The role of the staff is to assist the veteran obtain the knowledge, insight and skills needed to maintain a utilization of interdisciplinary team members, 12-step recovery and other treatment modalities assisting in reaching toward this end.

The ADS motto is "ADS adds quality to life. Quality to the lives of veterans, their families and community by promoting and coaching sobriety" (ADS Program Guide).

Staff Interviews

My first interview was with Uzoma (Uzo) C. Obineche, CSW-PIP, MAC, NCC; Program Coordinator, Addictive Disorders. He was very open to explaining in depth the treatment programs and his personal reflections as well as answering my questions. Uzo expressed some frustration that approximately 75% of his job was administrative and paperwork, and 25% was clinical. He expressed that he preferred the clinical work but accepted his administrative responsibilities. He gave me a tour of the facility, introduced me to fellow staff members and arranged for further interviews.

My second extensive interview was with Michael L. Barnes, MAEDC; Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist. Mr. Barnes explained the different work programs and job training available at the hospital, and that the hospital worked in conjunction with Western Technical Institute which offers certification to veterans for various career positions such as Hospital Janitor, Environmental Maintenance Specialist, VA Housekeeping, and Food Service Positions. The veterans are paid minimum wage for 20 hours a week with credit applying to certification and eventual transfer of work into the community.

Another important part of the treatment program Mr. Barnes emphasized was the spiritual aspect, not only the 12-step structure but also culturally designed programs focused on Native American Indian veterans such as Pipi Inipi, Fire Plan and weekly Sweat Lodge ceremonies. CSAT (1999) reports that alcohol impacts this population (Native American) in terms of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, injuries, and death. In a comparison of American Indians with the general population, May (1986) found higher death rates, more deaths caused by cirrhosis of the liver, and more incidents of suicide and homicide. T.J.Young (1988) reports that 75% of the deaths in this ethnic population are related to alcohol. May (1996) found that more than one-third of the deaths were due to cirrhosis of the liver from alcoholism. Alcohol is the number-one cause of arrests (CSAT, 1999). Mr. Barnes strongly cautioned "how bad a drug alcohol is!" Native American traditional spiritual approaches include: Talking Circle/Talk Stick, Sweat Lodge, and Right Path of Life (Geri Miller, 2010). Other participant programs include participant veteran's government, Bible study, and chaplain services.

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier

An Oasis of Healing 5

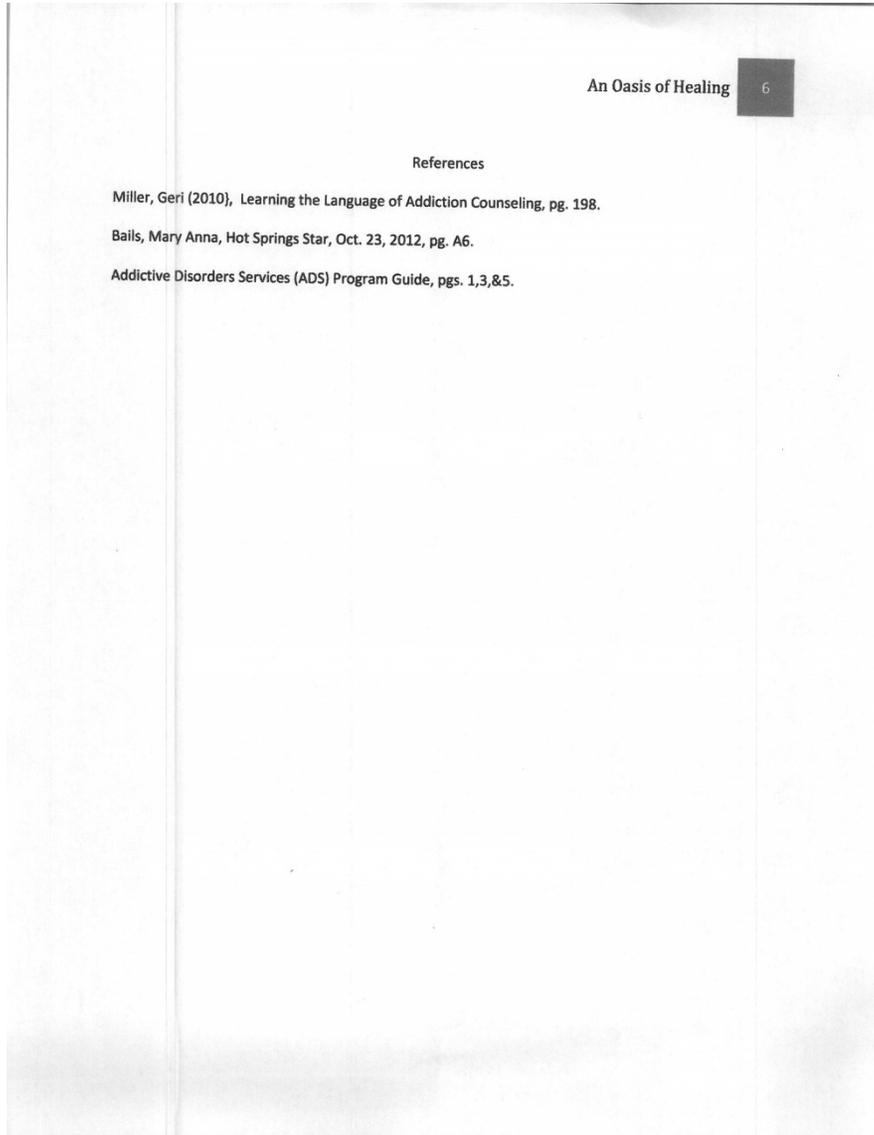
The third person Uzo arranged for me to interview was Sara Bates, a PTSD/Addiction Therapist. Ms. Bates stated she received her degree from Chadron State College in Nebraska and commuted daily to Hot Springs (about 60 miles). In addition to her college training and addictions certification, she was studying Interpersonal Psychotherapy and referred me to the book, "The Comprehensive Guide to Interpersonal Psychotherapy" by Weissman, Merkoritz, & Klerman. Ms. Bates stated, "This therapeutic approach helps with bringing veterans out of isolation and promotes social interaction". Ms. Bates also said she received specialized training in Brief Therapy and Grief Therapy.

Conclusion

As I was leaving the Veterans Hospital in Hot Springs I felt I had experienced a very positive, respectful, and healthy natural healing environment. Most of the staff and veterans smiled and greeted me during my visit, some veterans even respectfully called me "Sir"! There is, however, a cloud hanging over this facility. There is ongoing talk about closing the VA in Hot Springs and moving it to Rapid City. A recent article in the Rapid City Journal stated, "The 134 residents, veterans, and their spouses at the Hot Springs facility like it there and most of them don't want to move. They appreciate the peaceful setting and the good care they receive...they love the location for its small-town atmosphere". In a guest editorial in the Hot Springs Star, Hot Springs resident Mary Anna Bails writes, "We are proud that it (the VA Hospital) is one of the outstanding facilities in the US. Its reputation is well earned for being caring for all Vets and their families. The facility is gorgeous with its landscaping, sitting here in the Southern Black Hills. Do you know that Hot Springs has the warmest weather in South Dakota? Compared to Rapid City with its constant harsh winds, it is truly a banana belt. Its stately, sound architecture is awesome and one of a kind in our great nation. The national cemetery on the grounds inspires its spiritual beauty. It is a unique National Memorial to past and present Veterans. It is a place of healing, both physical and spiritual."

The addiction program, the work program, and the living component (especially for homeless veterans) all in one location and all living and healing together inspired my impression of the Hot Springs Veterans Hospital as an "Oasis of Healing".

Commenter IH19: Patrick Heier



Commenter IH20: Roger Hollrah

Commenter IH20: Roger Hollrah

COMMENT FORM

VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM RECONFIGURATION
Draft Environmental Impact Statement SH

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

NAME: <u>Roger Hollrah</u>	ADD TO MAILING LIST? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
EMAIL ADDRESS:	IF YES, I PREFER TO BE CONTACTED BY: <input type="checkbox"/> EMAIL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U.S. POST OFFICE MAIL
STREET ADDRESS: [REDACTED]	
CITY/STATE/ZIP: <u>Chadron Ne. 69337</u>	
ORGANIZATION (if any):	
Comments:	
<p>I do not understand how the V.A. can warrant spending many millions building new V.A. hospitals (like Denver) but cannot do a little revitalization on our Hot Springs V.A. Please think of what hardship it will cause on us old veterans if Hot Springs V.A. is closed down.</p> <p>I have an appointment at Ft Meade the 6th of Apr.</p> <p>I had a [REDACTED] in Hot Springs a few weeks ago on my neck. Now I must drive a 300 mile round trip if I want to see a neurosurgeon.</p> <p>I am 84 yrs. my wife is on full time oxygen + cannot drive any more. My appointment is just for a consultation. Does that make any sense. I can't afford to make these kind of trips nor do I feel safe driving it.</p> <p>Please help us vote keep our Hot Springs V.A. so we in this area (Western Ne, Eastern Wyo. + Southern S.D.) have at least a chance to get to A V.A. for help.</p> <p>Roger Hollr Korean Vet U.S.A.F. Thank you for your time</p>	

Comments must be postmarked or sent electronically by **February 8, 2016**.
Email to yablackhillsfuture@va.gov.
Postal mail to address on reverse.
Online submission direct to EIS contractor at www.blackhillsseis.com (with option to submit anonymously).

IH20-1: Renovation of this historic Hot Springs campus are greater than new build although, as VA has pointed out, the final decision is not based solely on cost. A more detailed breakout of the cost of each alternative is now provided in Section 2.3 of the Final EIS.

IH20-2: The long distances Veterans now have to drive is a major concern for the VA and one of the primary drivers in the proposed reconfiguration. While Veterans will always have a choice to go to a VA hospital, an integral element of the proposed reconfiguration - under all the alternatives - is that eligible Veterans have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.

IH20-3: VA acknowledges your support to keep the existing campus open and fully functional. While the hospital would be closed under the new preferred alternative A-2, primary and some specialty care would still be provided on the existing Hot Springs campus, in a renovated Building 12.

IH
20-1

IH
20-2

IH
20-3

Commenter IH21: Lori Hankinson

Commenter IH21: Lori Hankinson

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#50



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 2:12:18 PM
 Last Modified: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 2:59:03 PM
 Time Spent: 00:46:45
 IP Address: 72.8.231.206

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Lori Hankinson
Address	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Hay Springs
State/Province	NE
ZIP/Postal Code	69347
Email Address	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

Imagine being a 75 year old Korean war veteran, who requires medication for diabetes, seizures and PTSD who has to drive 3 hours to Hot Springs South Dakota, for a fasting Lab meaning he can't take his diabetes or seizure meds, So on this drive his sugar is dropping but he knows he can make it to Hot Springs to the VA for his lab and knows he can get there before his sugar drops out so he makes his way to Hot Springs. On this drive, his tire blows out which triggers his PTSD. He is almost to Hot Springs thanks to a Kind soul who respects our veterans and helps him change his tire, When he arrives at the hospital his blood sugar is down to 50 and his anxiety is through the roof he goes to the lab gets his blood drawn and immediately goes to get him something to eat, People notice his anxiety is High and they ask him what the problem is, He tells them what happened and they tell him that he has to go on to fort meade south dakota to see the people who can help him with his anxiety, He doesn't want to go to Fort Meade first off he can't drive that far alone second off his anxiety is through the roof, he goes back home three hours away, and commits suicide because of his anxiety levels and the fact that he basically got pushed through the cracks, we need to KEEP THE VA in HOT SPRINGS SOUTH DAKOTA. It makes no sense to have buildings there that we have to pay on for upkeep because it's a historical place and close them down Thank you for your time

IH
21-1

IH21-1: Your experience and those of other Veterans who now must travel great distances to receive health care is a major concern for the VA and one of the primary drivers in the proposed reconfiguration. While Veterans will always have a choice to go to a VA hospital, an integral element of the proposed reconfiguration - under all the alternatives - is that eligible Veterans have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IH22: Charles Hay

Commenter IH22: Charles Hay

Black Hills ETS Public Comment

#24



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Tuesday, December 01, 2015 6:53:46 PM
 Last Modified: Tuesday, December 01, 2015 7:05:39 PM
 Time Spent: 00:11:53
 IP Address: 69.77.198.235

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Charles Hay
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Hot Springs
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57747
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is:

I wish to provide my comments anonymously. Do not add me to the mailing list.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

As a disabled Vietnam Veteran, I am appalled at how the politicians in this country continue to disrespect and disenfranchise veterans. They are more than eager to get us into ridiculous unwarranted wars (you rarely, if ever see THEIR loved ones volunteering to serve) however when we come home broken for life, that is where their shallow promises end. Closing the VA facility for n Hot Springs is nothing more than a thinly veiled political ploy to make themselves look efficient by cutting something. How about voluntarily cutting their ridiculously inflated salaries and benefits for a change. This country sorely needs a thorough house cleaning in Washington. Veterans are reaching the end of their collective ropes, and are not going to take these constant slaps in the face anymore! If you think we are simply a bunch of meek sheep, THINK AGAIN!

Thank you for your comment. However, this is out of scope of this EIS.

Commenter IH23: Sheri Henry

Commenter IH23: Sheri Henry

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#21



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Monday, November 30, 2015 9:11:24 PM
 Last Modified: Monday, November 30, 2015 9:30:11 PM
 Time Spent: 00:18:47
 IP Address: 216.47.38.184

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Sheri Henry
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Keystone
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57751
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

I was unable to download the huge file of the Draft EIS to be able to read it so I will keep my comments short. I am a veteran who used the VA at Hot Springs for my health care from 2006-2014. I found that the quality of health care steadily declined until I finally decided to switch to Fort Meade VA in 2015. The health care is undoubtedly better at Fort Meade, however, just to get an appointment for my annual physical is a 2 1/2 month wait. I would much prefer that a new VA Hospital be built in Rapid City where the largest percentage of veterans in our area live and work.

IH
23-1

IH23-1: There are no plans to build a new hospital in Rapid City, but Rapid City Regional Hospital may now be available for eligible Veterans in the VA BHHCS. The proposed reconfiguration calls for closing of the existing hospital, however, outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs (on the existing campus in renovated Building 12 under the new preferred alternative A-2). In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (e.g., hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IH24: Joe Hiller

Commenter IH24: Joe Hiller

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#28



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Thursday, December 10, 2015 3:08:22 PM
 Last Modified: Thursday, December 10, 2015 3:25:54 PM
 Time Spent: 00:17:31
 IP Address: 162.212.19.8

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	Joe Hiller
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Scottsbluff
State/Province	NE
ZIP/Postal Code	69361
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here-reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

I wish to present a few points at issue with the EIS and the executive summary.

1. I do not believe the VA developed enough data to substantiate the claim that any alternative other than "Save the VA" will yield better service to area veterans. The VA apparently believes the issue of travel for veterans is inconsequential. It is bad enough as is. I do not think the sampling and math is robust enough for this claim.
2. I do not believe the claim of "...affect on school enrollments" is substantiated by tested data. I cannot possibly believe that the range of impact on enrollments at Hot Springs would be as low as (only) -1% or as high as +4.4%. Particularly troubling is the -1% figure. That cannot be correct, in my estimation. I lived in Hot Springs for 18 years and attended schools there. It seems this range of numbers is sufficiently padded (-1%) and fluffed (+4.4%) as to cause suspicion, while serving to support the VA preferred alternative.
3. The impact on economies (socioeconomic section) is vague and imprecise as well. The impact, under Alternatives A, B, C and D are summarized to lead the reader to conclude that "adverse minor to moderate impact" would occur. What is "minor"? What is "moderate"? This language is understandably vague and unhelpful; and supports the VA preferred alternative. Under Alternative E, the impact in Hot Springs is "minor to major beneficial", while also "negligible to minor" in Rapid City and other counties. I agree on this point. Alternative E is the only choice that will not devastate the economy in Hot Springs--while also appearing to impact other counties and Rapid City negligibly.

IH24-1: Distances Veterans now have to travel is a major concern to the VA and one of the main drivers for the proposed reconfiguration. One of the ways to address the driving concerns is through an expanded care in the community program that is an integral element in all the alternatives. Eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.1 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled, and Section E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IH24-2: Section 4.11 of the Final EIS has been revised to address potential impacts on the local school system (school enrollment) in Hot Springs.

IH24-3: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and Sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16 of the Final EIS have been expanded to address the local impacts on Hot Springs. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts.

IH24-4: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IH
24-1

IH
24-2

IH
24-3
IH
24-4

Commenter IH25: Lori Hofer

Commenter IH25: Lori Hofer

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#62



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Thursday, May 05, 2016 2:44:51 PM
 Last Modified: Thursday, May 05, 2016 9:21:30 PM
 Time Spent: 06:36:36
 IP Address: 66.69.67.67

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name: Lori L. Hofer
 Address: [Redacted]
 City/Town: Hot Springs
 State/Province: SD
 ZIP/Postal Code: [Redacted]
 Email Address: [Redacted]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here-reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments);

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a veteran employee of the Hot Springs VA. I have read the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and following are my comments. I believe the best solution to the changes coming in veterans' health care is Alternative E as proposed by the Save the VA Committee. The purchasing of care, the associated costs of travel monies, and construction of unneeded facilities is poor stewardship of resources. Veterans will face even longer distances and travel times to receive their care, as the rural settings in which we live do not support the primary care or specialty care already available to the veterans in the Rapid City/Fort Meade area. A better expenditure of resources is to renovate the existing campus at Hot Springs and restore it to a fully functioning hospital. Since the last report was written, the Indian Health Service (IHS) hospitals have come under scrutiny and have been closed in this area, reducing access for Native American veterans, so IHS access is reduced as an option for local care for them, resulting in longer travel distances and time to access medical care.

Page 4, Para 1.1.2.1: In bold, underlined print, it is emphasized that the reconfiguration proposal does not include any changes to the facilities at Fort Meade; however, at this time a surgical tower is under construction. This, coincidentally, is happening after surgical procedures have been eliminated at Hot Springs. It is my opinion that construction of this tower should not have occurred until this EIS process was complete, yet another attempt to show that Hot Springs doesn't need to stay open as a healthcare facility.

Paragraph 1.2.2.2.1: This data is skewed; the numbers refer to patients residing in Fall River and Pennington counties to make the reader believe Rapid City is a better place to have a clinic, while not addressing at all the veterans living in the farther highly rural areas in southwestern South Dakota as well as Nebraska and Wyoming who travel to Hot Springs for their primary care. As far as I am concerned, any patient numbers in this report are not accurate. When the same veteran gets care at both Hot Springs and Fort Meade and is counted as a separate patient, a different method needs to be developed to truly count patient numbers or care received by the same patient at different VA facilities.

IH25-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IH25-2: VA is upgrading the Fort Meade campus because the standards for surgical space changed. There are no anticipated projects to change the physical plant of the Fort Meade campus as a result of the proposed reconfiguration. See group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to Fort Meade; revised Section 1.1.2.1 also further clarifies the scope of the EIS relative to Fort Meade.

IH25-3: VA used the most up-to-date information available relating to Veteran population and distribution and use of existing facilities within the VA BHHCS service area. The agency is responsible for Veterans health care nationwide and continually compiles data from all facilities about volumes and services. Exhibit 1 in Chapter 1 has been updated and expanded to include more current Veteran population data.

IH25-1

IH25-2

IH25-3

Commenter IH25: Lori Hofer	
<p style="text-align: center;">Black Hills EIS Public Comment</p> <p>The paragraph following this discusses patients to support services or specialties. The community of Rapid City already has existing community services and specialties to support veterans. With the ready availability of providers locally, the Veterans' Choice program and other purchases of non-VA care, this eliminates the need to build any facilities in Rapid City and would even allow closure of the Rapid City VA clinic since veterans living in that area are within the 30 minute/40 mile driving distance for primary care and within 60 minutes to drive to secondary care for either community or VA-provided care. This would be proper stewardship of VA resources, not building a new building.</p> <p>Page 7, paragraph 1.2.1. By further reducing the services available at the Hot Springs VA, coupled with the low primary care and specialty care services available in the small rural communities of the veterans it serves, the 4 bullets below the statement of purpose and need are not met: locations and facilities do not support efforts to enhance and maintain quality and safety of care; standards of care will not be supported or maintained; access to care where veterans reside will be decreased; and out-of-pocket expenses for veterans' travel will be increased in addition to veterans possibly being made to pay deductibles and co-pays for care received locally which they got for no cost at VA Black Hills. The current facilities need to be renovated to the proposal under Alternative E as proposed by the Save the VA Committee.</p> <p>Paragraph 1.2.2: I believe the Hot Springs VA maintains very high-quality, safe, and accessible care at its campus – at least the care that remains since the initial announcement made by Mr. Steve DiStasio in December 2011 that the hospital was going to be closing and "nobody was going to lose their jobs," but he also "had to figure out a way to cut 300 workers." The reduction and elimination of services in Hot Springs, forcing veterans to travel longer distances for care, has been done by not backfilling vacancies of employees who've resigned or retired. Since I began working in Hot Springs in September 2011, I have witnessed the closing of our nuclear medicine department due to retirements, the loss of the full-time radiologist, the retirement of the x-ray department supervisor, the shutting down of performing of surgeries here, the elimination of cardiac rehabilitation services, the retirement and relocation of medical doctors, contract hospitalists coming and going, 4 full-time pharmacists relocating, decreased MRI services, 2 lab tech vacancies for over 2 years, and our emergency room downgraded to an urgent care. It is my opinion that it is not the locations nor facilities which constrain the quality of care, range of services, and access to care. I believe the rumors about the hospital closing are very effectively tainting the pool of prospective employees willing to work in Hot Springs. I heard an employee from human resources tell that a person was not willing to relocate their family to Hot Springs because of not knowing the future of the hospital.</p> <p>On page 25 of the EIS, VA proposes to reconfigure health care services throughout the VA BHHCS catchment area, including the addition of purchased care for Veterans from community providers (3 tertiary care facilities and 28 secondary care facilities), which would improve VA BHHCS's compliance with VA's "Geographic Access to Care" guidelines.</p> <p>Moving care farther away, to Rapid City, is contradictory to this statement for veterans served by VA Hot Springs.</p> <p>In the VA's SUPPLEMENT TO RESEARCH STUDY REPORT - VA HOSPITAL BUILDING SYSTEM, SECTION 3-4, Life Cycle Costs: I was amazed to read the following, as it exemplifies what the Hot Springs campus is today! People back in the '70's knew that quality construction stood the test of time and would and withstand renovation in order to expand and change according to needs. Once again, new isn't always better!!</p> <p>Unlike some private sector Owners, VA can be expected to occupy a hospital building for 40, 50, or more years. For such long terms, the costs of operating, maintaining, and altering buildings will usually exceed their first cost several times over. Section 752 in Volume 3 of the Red Book analyzes the savings in housekeeping, maintenance, and alteration for a systems building compared to a traditional building. The general observations and principles contained in Section 752 still apply today and are supported by the experiences and observations of Medical Center Facilities Managers (see Appendix A). The VAHBS permits a much greater ease, time saving, and quality of routine and emergency maintenance, and alterations or changes with substantially less impact on occupied spaces. These factors can be expected to produce cost savings compared to traditional construction. However, methods and procedures used by VA for funding operation, maintenance, and alterations; and tracking expenses still make detailed assignment of costs and analysis difficult (and beyond the scope of this Supplement). Recent trends in construction costs will likely affect the relationship of Life Cycle Costs to First Costs. For example, construction costs (first costs) would appear to be seeing considerable escalation at present. As noted previously, some sub-systems or components such as steel and concrete are increasing faster than the overall escalation rate. Some portions of the country are affected to a much greater degree than others. Such "spikes" in first costs will affect the relationship between Life Cycle Costs and First Costs. In certain instances, the result may be a longer "pay-back" period for savings in housekeeping, maintenance and renovations. The basic premise outlined in Section 752.5 of the Red Book, i.e., that the cost of major alterations within a VAHBS building are less than those for a conventional building should still hold true. Indeed given the apparent current market place preference by bidding contractors in certain locations, savings may actually be magnified.</p>	<p>IH25-4: It is important for Veterans to have VA and non-VA options for health care and has proposed both as part of the reconfiguration. This includes an expanded VA facility (CBOC to MSOC) in Rapid City given the Veteran population it supports and the need to address geographic access concerns that exist throughout the catchment area.</p> <p>IH25-5: VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. An important element of the proposed reconfiguration is VA's care in the community program which allows Veterans to receive care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. Since publication of the Draft EIS, VA has been given authority to expand the purchased care program, now referred to as Care in the Community, to Veterans that was not available before and now potentially hundreds of providers are available to eligible Veterans. It helps serve as a important way to improve overall quality and delivery of care. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.</p> <p>IH25-6: Past decisions relating to staffing levels and health care services are made by Veterans Health Administration professionals (leaders, planners and health care practitioners and professionals), based on a variety of factors, and are not subject to a NEPA review. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to the past decline in services and the extent to which it has been considered in the Final EIS.</p>
84 / 89	

Commenter IH25: Lori Hofer

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

General trends suggest that more "difficult" alteration projects with greater phasing, access and temporary work considerations and restrictions are considerably less attractive than "new" build or "less restrictive" alteration construction projects. The cost of "General Conditions" will be greater than for less restrictive projects and bidders may add a factor for the perceived greater risk. Remodeling in VAHBS buildings compared to remodeling in conventional buildings should offer greater ease of construction, attractiveness to bidders and lower "premiums" for actual and/or perceived risk.

Remodel and Renovation

The VAHBS includes features that should facilitate the work and reduce impacts on occupied spaces in or adjoining the area of the work. The potential advantages of these features must be clearly communicated to bidders so that benefits in schedule (and consequently costs) may be realized. These features are intended to contain the impacts of the work to as limited an area as possible. By reducing impacts to the functional zone and surrounding occupied areas of the hospital, the need for temporary barriers, temporary utilities, phasing and "domino" moves may be reduced or eliminated. Features of the VAHBS that facilitate remodel and renovation include modular design, stacked service bays, service risers separated from functional zones, location of service equipment restricted to service bays (out of functional zones and interstitial area), provisions for access to exterior for major equipment replacement, provision of accessible interstitial service zones with dedicated subzones and channels; "oversizing" service mains, equipment rooms, shafts and risers; use of non-bearing partition systems (including smoke and fire) that terminate at interstitial platform; and coordination of fire zone and service module boundaries.

I close with the last paragraph of Recommendation B of Part 1 of the final draft of the VA publication "Innovative 21st Century Building Environments for VA Healthcare Delivery:"

In an era that emphasizes dispersing/integrating care within communities, it may be more effective to consider building very durable 100+ year buildings that are intrinsically habitable, so that they could be used for other functions, and highly flexible, so that they can accommodate changes in care delivery over time. Europeans have been accommodating the same essential care practices in intrinsically habitable buildings (such as those with daylighting and operable windows) for many decades.

The Hot Springs facility was built in this manner. It stands tall to accommodate any healthcare changes the VA wishes to throw at her, arms open to hold and care for her veterans and their families. It is a grave mistake to abandon this facility and the veterans of southwestern South Dakota, northwestern Nebraska, and northeastern Wyoming. Keeping a high level of care in Hot Springs is important to the viability of the veterans it serves and the town and county it occupies.

IH25-7

IH25-7: VA revised the statements about the suitability of the campus buildings to comply with the ABA. See group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E. Also, VA has selected a new preferred alternative in the Final EIS that includes renovation of Building 12 on the existing campus to house the new CBOC in Hot Springs.

Commenter IH26: John Hotz

Commenter IH26: John Hotz

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#38



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Wednesday, February 03, 2016 9:38:04 PM
 Last Modified: Wednesday, February 03, 2016 10:16:25 PM
 Time Spent: 00:38:21
 IP Address: 72.171.133.63

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	John Hotz
Address	[REDACTED]
Address 2	[REDACTED]
City/Town	Rushville
State/Province	NE
ZIP/Postal Code	69360
Email Address	[REDACTED]
Phone Number	[REDACTED]

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: Please contact me via email at the email address I entered above.

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

Sir, I have used the VA at Hot Springs for my only provider, since 1964. I chose to live in the panhandle of NE where I was born and raised and have lived. Because of where I chose to live I had to travel for medical care, so I chose VA. I have looked at and have attended a number of meetings and I do not believe that closing the site is the best answer. I understand that the numbers say Rapid City, but that is not the best way. I know that the best way to fix the problem is use the present facility and remodel some more and use it. It is a very usable facility and a new one would not be as good. I have been to the Rapid City facility and Sturgis facility and the Hot Springs facility is the best. Until the former director at Hot Springs decided he wanted something different, I believe most people were satisfied and happy. I believe that the people from Nebraska, Wyoming, and South Dakota would be best served by getting The VA at Hot Springs back and accepting patients. The meetings I attended were attended by large crowds of people and everyone the people, by a large majority, favored Hot Springs being opened back up as it was before. I have t/w all our Reps/Senators and they sided with the people. I was just in Denver and what a mess there is there at that New facility and is not close to being opened. Let's use common sense and get the Hot Springs facility reopened as it was and go forward and serve the the Vets instead of someone's idea that was bad. Respectfully, John Hotz Served as a Marine from 1960 - 1963

IH
26-1

IH26-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus, which would fall under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

Commenter II1: Robert Ikonen

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Robert Ikonen "Ike"
 Address: [REDACTED]
HOT SPRING S.D. 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: [REDACTED]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: I am concerned that the local
HEALTH FACILITIES WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SATISFY
THE NEEDS OF THE VETS THAT NOW USE HOT
SPRINGS V.A. WE HAVE LIMITED DOCTORS AND
A NEW SMALL HOSPITAL THAT WOULD HAVE A
BAD TIME WITH THE ADDED NEED.
I WOULD ALSO HAVE OVER A 100 MILE

Purpose: TRIP TO GO TO A RAPID CITY FACILITY.

ALSO THE NATIVE AMERICANS FROM PINE RIDGE
WOULD NEED BETTER TRANSPORTATION "BUS-SERVICE"

HOT SPRINGS IS ALSO KNOWN BEEN KNOWN FOR
IT HEALING WATER AND CALM LIFESTYLE.
NEEDED FOR CURES OF BODY AND MIND.

I Robert Ikonen give permission/authorization for _____ to
 enter this information online on my behalf.

Robert Ikonen Jan. 27, 2016.
 Signature Date

IH1-1: While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (e.g., hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care. Outpatient primary and some specialty care services would also remain available in Hot Springs, and on the existing campus in the new preferred Alternataive A-2.

IH1-1

Commenter IJ1: Ricardo Jacome

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Ricardo S Jacome

Address: [REDACTED]

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: _____

Purpose: _____

I RC Jacome give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Ricardo S Jacome Signature Date 22 April 2016

Commenter IJ1: Ricardo Jacome

The motto "to leave no man behind" has been a constant refrain in militaries around the world. In recent times, it has been repeated in the USA by presidents, commanding officers, battlefield veterans and adherents who believe that no honor is greater than the respect we pay our serving fighters when we bring them home, wounded or deceased.

And yet, here in our own country, the Department of Veteran Affairs would leave our dutiful veterans behind, turn its back on this sacred pledge, by closing a VA facility that for more than one hundred years has diligently discharged its duties in accordance with our national obligation. This refuge free of judgement. This poultice for sore spirits. This nurse to the ravaged bodies and the beleaguered minds. Yes, for a century, Hot Springs, SD in partnership with the VA, has brought our soldiers home.

So what does consolidation of facilities really imply? The derogation of these afflicted. The rejection of institutional responsibility. The exclusion of native American servicemen from the proximate centers of care and good will. The abnegation of promise and duty.

This country. We are the communities that shelter our veterans. We comprise their stalwart defenders. We fight for them as they did for us. And surely, generations in this small town have proudly integrated these veterans into our very lifeblood, into our commercial enterprises, into our spiritual retention. To abandon them now is to forsake us. We are no agency. We are the people. Please do not restrict the seasoned hands offered so long by this community to the veterans for whom we pledge a home.

Ricardo Christianizac Jacome
22 April 2016

VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that there is a need for change in the health services configuration, as described in the EIS, and that the proposed reconfiguration would better meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

Commenter IJ2: Donna Jenniges

Commenter IJ2: Donna Jenniges

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Donna Jenniges

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs SD 57247

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.1.1

Need: Difficulty recruiting/retaining qualified staff

This is a problem because of the threat of closure hanging over the facility. People are unwilling to commit to a move for a position that may soon not exist. So many services have been taken away, it is impossible for a dedicated professional staff to provide the quality of care they ~~desire to provide~~ would normally.

Purpose:

The purpose of the VA campus in Hot Springs has always been to provide the best care possible - emergency, routine or long term, also, to treat each veteran as an important individual rather than a case number.

I, Donna Jenniges give permission/authorization for Chamber of Commerce to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Donna Jenniges Date: 3/15/16

IJ2-1: There are many challenges to recruiting as described in Chapter 1 of the EIS. VA acknowledges that the uncertain future of the existing facility could also be a factor. Thank you for your comment.

IJ2-1

Commenter IJ2: Donna Jenniges

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Donna Jenniges

Address: [Redacted]

Hot Springs SD 57747

Phone: [Redacted]

e-mail: [Redacted]

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: 1.2.2.2

Need: Distance of travel

The addition of 1 1/2 hours of travel for medical care presents a hardship for aging veterans and their families. A man and his wife, both veterans, ages 90 & 91 have to go to Ft Meade for an early AM appointment that used to be offered in Hot Springs. This is not only a hardship, it is a safety issue.

IJ2-1

Purpose: The need to restore services beside a CBOC staffed only certain days or hours.

I Donna Jenniges give permission/authorization for Chamber of Commerce to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Donna Jenniges Date: 2/15/16

IJ2-1: While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live, which would include less travel. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IJ2: Donna Jenniges

Addition Comment:

Does anyone listen to the VETERANS? I have attended many meetings in the last five years and listened to hundreds of veterans from South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska and Native American veterans. For all the positive comments about the facility in Hot Springs, I have heard only two who stated they thought Hot Springs should be closed. The VABHCS in Hot Springs and the people and businessess have cared for and about veterans for over 100 years and continue to do so. The former director stated publicly that he wanted the dom in Hot Springs closed and a new facility built in Rapid City. So services were slowly and systematically taken away. No director, or secretary or politician should be more important than the VETERAN and the care he/she deserves.

IJ2-3

IJ2-3: VA has listened to the Veterans and is reviewing and considering all the comments provided on the Draft EIS. Partially in response to these comments, VA has selected a new preferred alternative A-2 in the Final EIS that includes renovating Building 12 on the existing campus for the new CBOC.

VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans.

Donna Jenniges
Signature

2/15/16
Date

Commenter IJ3: James Johnson

Commenter IJ3: James Johnson

Duplicate partial letter of full comment letter in IJ4 below. See response to IJ4.

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Jim Johnson
 Address: [REDACTED]
Hot Springs, S.D. 57747
 Phone: [REDACTED]
 e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: The one telling point of this idea of closing the Hot Springs V.A. Hospital and/or clinic is the far reaching affect on the entire community. Hot Springs not being a strong economy to begin with may have the final killing blow to the town as a whole. It is not a town of strong growth, that can be seen in the number of closed businesses.

Purpose: The main point is that, Veterans as I am, would most certainly have an immediate affect of many miles to travel. My wife and I moved to Hot Springs for that purpose eight years ago. That is not near the difference it would make for those ~~are~~ Veterans that would drive from Nebraska, Wyoming or other outlying locations. Needless to say we are not the young people we were, that have fought in past wars and present wars.

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

James Johnson Date 1/31/16
 Signature Date

Commenter IJ4: Jim Johnson

Commenter IJ4: Jim Johnson

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Jim Johnson

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, S.D. 57747

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: The one telling point of this idea of closing the Hot Springs VA Hospital and/or clinic is the far reaching affect on the entire community. Hot Springs not being a strong economy to begin with may have the final killing blow to the town as a whole. It is not a town of strong growth, that can be seen in the number of closed businesses.

Purpose: The main point is that, Veterans as I am, would most certainly have an immediate affect of many miles to travel. My wife and I moved to Hot Springs for that purpose eight years ago. That is not near the difference it would make for those ~~VA~~ Veterans that would drive from Nebraska, Wyoming or other outlying locations. Needless to say we are not the young people we were, that have fought in past wars and present wars.

I _____ give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Jim Johnson Date 1/31/16

IJ4-1: VA recognizes the potential adverse impacts on the local economy and businesses and these have been addressed in revised Sections 4.10, 4.11 and 4.16 of the Final EIS. See also group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to socioeconomic impacts.

IJ4-1

IJ4-2: While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, outpatient primary care and some specialty care services would still be available in Hot Springs. Also, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and to purchased care option and quality of care.

IJ4-2

Commenter IJ4: Jim Johnson

Addition Comment: *In closing, I believe those that are making these decisions should stop and consider the deep concerns of all and numbers of people, whether it be economical or medical. The V.A. does employer many residence and a small town as Hot Springs can not compete with larger cities.*

IT makes no common sense to close one location that can not be ignored completely due to being a historical site. Then turn and spend several millions of dollars to satisfy special concerns.

Jim Johnson
Signature

11/21/16
Date

IJ4-3

IJ4-3 Designation as a National Historic Landmark does not prevent a federal agency from fulfilling its mission, in this case, providing quality health care to Veterans. See related group response in Table E-2 of Appendix E relating to Cultural Resources/Historic Properties for more information.

Commenter IJ5: Dale Jones

Commenter IJ5: Dale Jones

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Dale Lee Jones
Address: [Redacted]
Hot Springs, SD 57747
Phone:
e-mail:

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No 1.2.2.2 distance jobs must travel

Section: 3.10.2.6 VA BHHCS Employees

Need: The VA has 357 FTE's & 18 It close the jobs will leave as well as the employees. We need the Veterans & workers to give our kids pride in our country. We are called the Veterans town. I have lived in Hot Springs my whole

Purpose: Life & I have heard wonderful thing from the Vets. The PTSD program get good results here in this age & quiet town. I don't want the vets to leave. All the old vets I have seen over the years are the ones that will have to travel for services

The VA must stay. 2.3.5 Alternative E: Save the VA I Dale Lee Jones give permission/authorization for [Signature] proposal enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Dale Jones Date: 2/20/16

IJ5-1: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IJ5-1

Commenter IJ6: Kadin Jones

Commenter IJ6: Kadin Jones

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Kadin M. Jones

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No 1.2.2.2.1 Distinc

Section: 3.10.2.3- Housing to travel

Need: I think having the veterans here is good because this is a calm place for them to live. The veterans support the veterans our business. I have always lived in Hot Springs & my grandpa was a veteran from Viet Nam &

Purpose: a Green Benette. He tells me alot of stories of he would have to go to Rapid City for services. We wouldnt have to Rapid or we would have to drive him.

2.3.5 Alternative Save the VA Proposal

I Kadin M. Jones give permission/authorization for Sarah Polster to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature: Kadin Jones Date: 2/20/16

IJ6-1: While the proposed reconfiguration calls for closing of the existing hospital, outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs (and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2). In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live, so travel to Rapid City may not be necessary. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and purchased care option and quality of care.

IJ6-1

IJ6-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IJ6-2

Commenter IJ7: Kylee Jones

Commenter IJ7: Kylee Jones

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Comment Sheet

Name: Kylee Jones

Address: [REDACTED]

Hot Springs, SD 57747

Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Release Information to the Congressional Yes No

Section: _____

Need: 3.10.2.3. Housing.

The vets will have to move to rapid city to get services, for the war zone we will miss the veterans because they tell us their stories & we understand

Purpose: more than next best of social media. I want the veterans to stay in Hot Springs.

2.3.5 Alternative E - Save the VA. Proposer

I Kylee Jones give permission/authorization for _____ to enter this information online on my behalf.

Signature Kylee Jones Date 2/20/16

IJ7-1: While the proposed reconfiguration calls for closing of the existing hospital, outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs (and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2). In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live, so travel to Rapid City may not be necessary. See group responses in E.3.1 and E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to distance travelled and purchased care option and quality of care.

IJ7-1

IJ7-2: VA acknowledges your support for expanded services at the Hot Springs campus under Alternative E (Save the VA proposal) and has made it part of the public record for this EIS.

IJ7-2

Commenter IJ8: Angela Jarding

Commenter IJ8: Angela Jarding

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, December 9, 2015 3:49 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Comment for EIS and Hot Springs VA

From: Jarding, Angela [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, December 03, 2015 9:31 AM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment for EIS and Hot Springs VA

I understand that keeping the Hot Springs VA will be an expensive task. However, with the growing number of veterans, I feel that we are doing a disservice to them if we close this facility. It offers veterans in rural America the chance for a more peaceful place to heal and live in more solitude and maybe escape their memories of war. I have been told by many veterans that it is a great place to heal. Veterans shouldn't be forced to move from rural America just so they can be closer to a VA system. Veterans in rural Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming are already traveling 2-4 hours just to reach the Hot Springs facility. Another 2 hr drive to Ft. Mead is really bad.

Hot Springs is a great rural community, but we are also one of the poorest counties in the state. If you continue to take good jobs away from rural America, they will become ghost towns, and the people stuck in poverty. Children are forced to leave their hometowns because there is nothing better than an \$8.00/hr job. Hot Springs is a beautiful area which could continue to bring retired veterans to this community in the future. I think if you consider the "future" of what Hot Springs and the surrounding Black Hills could offer for development it would be WISE to re-invest in the Hot Springs VA.

Thank you,
 Angela Jarding
 Hot Springs, SD 57747

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IJ8-1

IJ8-1: VA is committed to providing quality care to its Veterans and believes that the proposed reconfiguration will allow that - to meet the current and future needs of our Veterans. While the proposal calls for closing of the existing hospital, outpatient primary health care and certain specialty care services will continue to be provided in Hot Springs (and on the existing campus under the new preferred alternative A-2). In addition, eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response in E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

Commenter IJ9: Daniel Johnston

Commenter IJ9: Daniel Johnston

From: VA Black Hills Future <vablackhillsfuture@va.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2016 5:28 PM
Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] Hot Springs Closure.

From: david212rv [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 02, 2016 5:19 PM
To: VA Black Hills Future
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Hot Springs Closure.

- 1. I can not name any other area that has two VA hospitals so close together. It makes no sense.
- 2. Rather than two small hospitals offering basically the same services, have one bigger hospital offering more.

OR

The hospital at Ellsworth was originally built as a 150 bed facility in the 1950s. It was expanded and updated several times since then. Then in the 1990s it was down sized to a clinic. The second and third floors sit empty, the elevators are turned off. Second floor had a four room surgical suite, third floor had an OB unit. Using that would make more sense than the Hot Springs facility. Joint USAF/VA facilities have been used before, at Kirkland AFB and Nellis AFB.

David P. Johnston, Lt. Col, USAF, NC (Ret)

[REDACTED]
Rapid City, SD 57702

Sent from my Samsung Galaxy Tab® S

IJ9-1: VA recognizes the inefficiencies of operating two large campuses within the same service area in Chapter 1. Under the proposed reconfiguration, the Hot Springs hospital would be closed, although some other services would remain. Veterans would have the option to go to Fort Meade, however, an integral part of all the alternatives is that eligible Veterans now have more options for care from community providers (hospitals), at VA expense, closer to where Veterans live. See group response E.3.3 in Appendix E relating to purchased care option and quality of care.

IJ9-1

IJ9-2: Thank you for your comment and suggestion. VA is always looking into ways to provide quality while maintaining efficiency and often coordinates with DoD in this regard.

IJ9-2

Commenter IJ10: Suzanne Julin

Commenter IJ10: Suzanne Julin

PUBLIC SUBMISSION

As of: 1/7/16 8:37 AM
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Comments Due: February 05, 2016
Submission Type: API

Docket: VA-2015-VACO-0001
 Notices Requesting Comments

Comment On: VA-2015-VACO-0001-0272
 Environmental Impact Statements; Availability, etc.: Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System; FR Doc. #2015-27684

Document: VA-2015-VACO-0001-1295
 Comment on Environmental Impact Statements; Availability, etc.: Reconfiguration of VA Black Hills Health Care System; FR Doc. #2015-27684; Julin, Suzanne

Submitter Information

Name: Suzanne Julin
Address:

[Redacted Address]

Missoula, MT, 59802

Email: [Redacted Email]

Phone: [Redacted Phone]
Submitter's Representative: NA
Organization: NA

General Comment

As the historian who wrote the National Historic Landmark nomination for Battle Mountain Sanitarium, and as a person with a long association with the town of Hot Springs, I believe I am well qualified to comment on this draft study.

The former Battle Mountain Sanitarium, as the first facility of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers to address health and medical issues rather than domiciliary needs, is a direct antecedent to the modern DVA health system. The last of eleven campuses built or otherwise established across the country, BMS is a product of a period in our history when veterans were recognized with facilities that displayed our country's respect for their service and concern for their well-being.

The arguments for discontinuing the role of this facility in the DVA system include the costs of modernizing the historic buildings to address contemporary needs. I urge decision makers to consider the costs of "moth-balling," and the unlikelihood of leasing or purchase of the property. I would suggest you compare this situation to those in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Leavenworth, Kansas, and Johnson City, Tennessee. The Wisconsin and Kansas NHDVS (now DVA) buildings were largely abandoned in favor of new construction, but under federal law must be at least minimally maintained. In Johnson City, (NHDVS name Mountain Home) buildings were adapted to serve contemporary needs. Perhaps a comparative study of costs of mothballing/maintenance versus such adaptation

<https://www.fds.gov/fdms/getcontent?objectid=0900006481debd&format=xml&showorig=false>[1/7/2016 8:39:49 AM]

IJ10-1: Cost is a factor in the decision to analyze alternatives for a reconfiguration of services in the VA BHHCS, but it is not the sole deciding factor.

IJ10-2: See group response in Table E-2 in Appendix E relating to the costs of alternatives, including mothballing costs. Section 2.3 in the final EIS also provides a more detailed breakout of costs of each alternative.

IJ10-1

IJ10-2

Commenter IJ10: Suzanne Julin

could be constructive.

The town of Hot Springs is widely known in the area as "The Veterans' Town." The community takes pride in both the DVA facility and the state soldiers' home and shows its support for the veterans who use the facilities in many ways. In my own experience, having spent time studying all eleven of the original NHDVS campuses, the staff of the former BMS are unparalleled in their appreciation and care for the facility they serve.

In this rural area, urban facilities are not necessarily superior facilities. The natural beauty and community acceptance veterans experience in Hot Springs provides its own kind of healing.

Please show respect and care for our veterans by seriously considering alternatives that will continue Battle Mountain Sanitarium as a resource for them.

<https://www.fcms.gov/fcms/getcontent?objectId=0900006481debfd&format=xml&showorig=false>[1/7/2016 8:39:49 AM]

Commenter IJ11: David Johnston

Commenter IJ11: David Johnston

Duplicates Comment IJ9-2 above. See response above.

Black Hills EIS Public Comment

#14



COMPLETE

Collector: New Web Link (Web Link)
 Started: Saturday, October 31, 2015 1:45:42 PM
 Last Modified: Saturday, October 31, 2015 1:51:09 PM
 Time Spent: 00:05:27
 IP Address: 67.4.61.169

PAGE 1: Public Comment on the Draft EIS for Reconfiguration of the VA Black Hills Health Care System.

Q1: Please enter your name and contact information.

Name	David Johnston
City/Town	Rapid City
State/Province	SD
ZIP/Postal Code	57702
Email Address	david212nv@yahoo.com
Phone Number	6053421761

Q2: My mailing list and contact preference is: *Respondent skipped this question.*

PAGE 2

Q3: Please enter your comments here--reference relevant pages/sections in the Draft EIS where appropriate, and be as specific as possible. (This field will expand as you type to accommodate your comments):

The ELLSWORTH AFB hospital was originally built in the 1950s as a 150 bed hospital. It was expand and modernized since that time. Then in the 1990s, downsized to an out patient clinic. Today, only the main floor is used, the second and third floors are empty with the elevators turned off. Why not do as was done at Kirtland AFB and Nellis AFB, make it a joint VA/USAF hospital. You could even bring in the IHS since they have 3a concern about health care too.

IJ11-1