

The Modesto Bee

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Three congressmen representing the San Joaquin Valley have called on President Barack Obama to expedite construction of new medical facilities for veterans to be built in San Joaquin County.

The bipartisan trio touted the economic needs of the region's thousands of veterans and the economic benefits from the creation of hundreds of jobs.

"The new San Joaquin facilities are badly needed, and any delays in commencing construction would be unacceptable," according to the letter dated Dec. 14 and signed by Reps. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced; Jeff Denham, R-Atwater; and Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton.

Earlier this year, the Department of Veterans Affairs picked a site in French Camp for a long-standing plan to build a nursing home and expanded outpatient clinic for veterans.

They note that veterans in the valley must often travel as far as Palo Alto to receive basic services. About 80,000-plus veterans live in Stanislaus, San Joaquin, Tuolumne and Calaveras counties.

The project is listed as a top priority by the VA, which expects operation could begin in 2018 after construction begins in 2013 or 2014, according to the letter. The lawmakers urged that everything be done to speed up the schedule.

A new outpatient clinic will ensure returning veterans will receive the highest quality medical care, Denham said.

The 900 jobs would be a great boost for San Joaquin County, McNerney said.

