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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0511

November 14, 2007

The Honorable Gordon H. Mansfield, Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
810 Vermont Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Acting Secretary Mansfield,

In meeting with many veterans from throughout my district and hearing their stories, I have become increasingly concerned about the mental distress that may afflict the men and women of our Armed Forces who serve in combat zones.

As a result, I am also increasingly concerned about the availability of VA services for veterans with both mental and physical wounds. With our nation's overseas engagements creating a new generation of veterans, we should be working to expand services to veterans. The Livermore VA Medical Center presents just such an opportunity. The peaceful, serene setting is ideal for a treatment clinic for PTSD and other mental distress.

With this in mind, I read with great interest a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association which found that substantially more Iraq veterans showed signs of mental distress, including PTSD, several months after returning home from deployment, as opposed to when they were screened immediately after their return.

In addition, the study's most disturbing finding indicates that rates of mental distress are dramatically higher for members of the National Guard and Army Reserves than active duty soldiers. Despite similar hospitalization levels and exposure to extreme combat situations as those on active duty, the guardsmen and reservists experienced much higher rates of interpersonal conflict, PTSD, and depression.

This study offers just the latest compelling evidence that we must do more to address the long-term mental health needs of our nation's veterans. In particular, it makes clear the need to do a better job reaching out to members of the National Guard and Army Reserves, on whom our nation has relied heavily to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Livermore VAMC Campus is a perfect fit for the kinds of needed mental health services highlighted in the study.

In my conversations with Secretary Nicholson before his departure, he indicated to me his willingness to consider a PTSD-focused treatment clinic on the site of the Livermore campus if such a need could be demonstrated.

Unfortunately, Secretaries Principi and Nicholson made decisions that will lead to the closure of the Livermore VAMC, under the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) review process, before this study was released. In fact, the study indicates the need for just the type of PTSD facility that Livermore's calming, tranquil setting would provide.

Furthermore, the Livermore VAMC Campus is less than fifteen miles from Parks Reserve Forces Training Area (Camp Parks). Camp Parks serves the training needs of more than 20,000 Army Reserve and California National Guard soldiers. The National Guard also has pending plans to expand their presence at Camp Parks. Many of these soldiers and their families have settled in the region and would find accessing the Livermore campus a convenient and accessible location upon their return to civilian life.

I urge you to strongly consider how the Livermore campus could be employed by the VA to treat the mental health needs of veterans in Northern California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry McNerney". The signature is somewhat stylized and slightly slanted to the right.

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress