Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 22, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear General Shinseki:

We are writing to ask for your personal intervention and leadership to reverse the VA's current consideration of the Livermore Realignment and Closure project's ranking in the VA's list of Top Twenty Major Medical Facility Projects. Action is needed now to ensure that funding is included in the President's FY16 budget for construction of the Central Valley Community Based Outpatient Clinic and Community Living Center in French Camp, California. These projects are integral to the Livermore Realignment and Closure initiative.

Central Valley veterans have been waiting far too long for access to the needed health care these facilities would provide and, unfortunately, the project has dropped in priority within the VA. Approved as part of the VA's own CARES initiative in 2004, the project has foundered despite demonstrated need and strong, bipartisan congressional support.

In briefings with your staff in March, we were shocked to learn the French Camp project's priority ranking for construction funding – always promised to be a top ten priority -- dropped from #10 to #19. This re-ranking under the new Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process is erroneous and fails to acknowledge many key factors, including the fact that the project will be "shovel ready" in 2015 versus many higher ranked projects that are years away from being ready. Left unchanged, it will be years before construction can proceed. Meanwhile in 2010 Congress appropriated $55 million for the purchase of the land and to fund construction planning.

The only thing standing in the way of progress and access to needed care is the VA's own ranking system which is being misapplied to and needlessly delaying the French Camp project:

- Credit as a Replacement Project. The Livermore Realignment and Closure initiative did not receive credit, or points, as a "replacement" project. That contradicts the fact that the French Camp project is a *replacement* project for the Livermore site.

- Departmental Initiative. The Livermore Realignment and Closure initiative is an approved project from the VA's Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Initiative, yet we believe it is not ranked as a "Departmental Initiative." CARES has now been replaced by a new VA Initiative entitled Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) which was initiated in 2010.

- Access to Care. The French Camp projects do not appear to receive any credit in the ranking process for "increasing access" to care, yet Central Valley veterans have no choice but to travel nearly 100 miles to the VA Palo Alto Hospital for specialty health care services. Requiring disabled and elderly veterans to travel this distance in heavily congested traffic takes up to 3-4 hours one way, also making this a safety issue.

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This clearly exceeds the VA's own standards of 30 minutes for general care and 60 minutes for acute care. A Central Valley facility would require an average 30 minute commute in heavy traffic. Moreover, the French Camp facilities would result in decreased "wait times" for veterans requiring care and specialty services.

- "Right-Sizing" of VA Inventory. The CARES Initiative included criteria based on unused, underutilized, collocation and space reuse/disposal. Currently, nearly half of the Livermore VA Campus is unused or underutilized. As part of the Livermore Realignment and Closure, the French Camps project satisfies this criteria as the project collocates Central Valley services in French Camp making available the entire Livermore campus for other use by the VA.

- Executable/Shovel Ready Projects. There appears to be errors/inconsistencies in the ranking of projects. The VA's 2015 Top Twenty List of Major Medical Facilities *does not reflect* or take into account which projects are at a sufficiently advanced stage to actually begin construction. There is at least one other higher-ranked project on the list that is not executable because land has not been secured and project design is not underway. Compare this to the French Camp projects where project design is complete, construction documents will be completed in 2015, and the land has been purchased.

During a conference call meeting with senior VA officials on April 10, 2014, VA staff acknowledged to us they underestimated the progress made on this project. During this same call and again during a subsequent April 25, 2014, town hall meeting we hosted for our veterans in French Camp, VA officials stated that all documents that would be needed to proceed to construction will be completed in 2015, making the project eligible for funding in the President's FY16 Budget Request.

We are frustrated that the French Camp project has stalled as a direct result of the VA's own, acknowledged misunderstandings. We specifically request the VA reevaluate the French Camp project in light of this information and that proper credit be given to ensure it can be included in the President's FY16 Budget Proposal.

Sincerely,

JEFF DENHAM
Member of Congress

JERRY McNERNEY
Member of Congress