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December 17, 2008

General Eric Shinseki, Secretary of Veterans Affairs designee
Obama-Biden Presidential Transition Headquarters
451 6th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear General Shinseki:

As a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I write to offer my congratulations on your nomination to head the Department of Veterans Affairs. Your past leadership as Chief of Staff of the Army and experience as a veteran will bring much needed insight and integrity to the role of Secretary.

As you know, one of the most important issues for our returning veterans is the VA's failure to adequately assist service members through the difficult transition from active duty to civilian life. Nothing exemplifies this challenge better than the decisions of your predecessors to shutter VA facilities nationwide during a time of war.

In California, the unfortunate decision was made to begin closing the Livermore VA through the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) process. The decision was made in spite of the fact that the Livermore VA serves more than 100,000 local veterans and is situated 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 its presence at Camp Parks. Many of these soldiers and their families have permanently settled in the region and find the Livermore campus to be a convenient and necessary resource upon their return to civilian life. Moreover, in FY2006, the Livermore VAMC served 11,433 inpatients and outpatients, had 55,973 outpatient encounters, 470 nursing home admissions, and racked up 35,831 bed days of care.

The number of veterans seeking care in California will continue to climb and there is a clear need for an increase in veterans' services in the area, not a reduction, especially for those with PTSD. Last April's RAND Study found that one in five U.S. troops is suffering from major depression or post-traumatic stress as a result of serving in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Livermore offers a peaceful, serene setting that is ideal for an expanded treatment clinic for PTSD and other mental illnesses.

Recently, I invited Congressman Bob Filner, the Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to the Livermore VAMC. After speaking with a group of local veterans who

told us they were being forced to take a 90 mile bus ride to the Palo Alto VA facility for health services, he quickly agreed Livermore should keep its doors open.

The process of phasing out the Livermore facility has ground to a standstill and virtually no action has been taken since Secretary Jim Nicholson left office. I have no doubt that you will confront this issue head on and will work tirelessly on behalf of our nation's veterans. Once you are settled in your new post I would very much like to arrange a meeting to discuss the Livermore facility.

America's veterans made a solemn promise by wearing the uniform of the United States and serving in harm's way overseas. We owe it to them to do everything we can to provide adequate health care when they return home. I look forward to working with you and the new Administration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jerry McNerney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress