

Thank you Mr Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify on an issue that is so very important to the veterans of Colorado and the surrounding states.

My name is Steve Rylant and I am the President of the United Veterans Committee of Colorado, a coalition of over 50 Veterans Service Organizations including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, The Disabled American Veterans, The Paralyzed Veterans of America and many others. Our organization works to support, testify and help get legislation passed on the Federal Level, and the State Level, that benefit veterans.

The need for this replacement VA Regional Medical Center goes back many years. I first became involved in 2007 when VA Secretary James Peak told us they had a new plan to lease 3 or 4 floors of the University of Colorado Medical Center for around 300 Million Dollars to replace the current facility. We strongly told him that would not be acceptable. The veterans deserve a stand alone full service Hospital and medical center.

When Eric Shinseki became the VA Secretary in 2009, he agreed. We had a ground breaking in August 2009. The VA put out a call for bids, accepted the bid from Kiewit Turner in October 2010. The VA and Kiewit Turner spent a year negotiating a contract. The UVC and its members told the VA that they needed to get a contract signed and start construction or we would bring our shovels on Veterans Day 2011, and start digging the hole for them. I have a pin that I wear that is a shovel with the letters BTDT. Build The Damn Thing! A week before that Veterans Day the VA and KT signed the contract and we had a celebration. Construction began January 2012, Two and a half Years after the ground breaking! From that day on we have kept a close eye on what has been going on, meeting with the VA, with Kiewit Turner, and with the Colorado Congressional Delegation.

There have been many other delays since that time as a result of the VA not approving change orders in a timely manner and subcontractors not getting paid for the work they had been completed for 4 to 6 months after the change order work was finished.

July of 2013 Kiewit Turner filed a complain in the United States Civilian Board of Contract Appeals that the construction design that they had received from the VA could not be completed with the 600 Million authorized by Congress and that it would take at least a billion dollars.

A hearing by the House Committee on Veterans Affairs was conducted in Denver in April of 2014 and Glenn Hagstrom, then Chief of Acquisition and Construction, testified that the VA did not need any additional funding from Congress and that they would win the litigation and KT would have to build the VA Medical Facility with the 600 Million already authorized. That was ridiculous!

In May of 2014 Eric Shinseki resigned as Secretary of the VA and subsequently VA Secretary Robert McDonald and Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson were confirmed. They had a Big Job ahead of them, as we will knew.

This past December, the United States Civilian Board of Contract Appeals ruled in favor of Kiewit Turner and found the VA in material breach of the contract. Since Kiewit Turner no longer had a valid contract to build the facility, they shut down the Project. When that happened, just weeks before Christmas, the subcontractors with about 1,100 workers on the project had to scramble to find other projects to replace this one to keep their people employed. Another delay

Deputy Secretary of the VA Sloan Gibson, within a week of the decision, came to Denver and met with the UVC and leadership of many of our members, and told us that Kiewit Turner required three things to restart the project. The US Army Corp of Engineers must take over administration of the Project, that they be paid a sum of money that KT put into the project to keep it going, and that they needed a bridge contract on a cost reimbursable basis with the VA until the US Army Corp of Engineers could negotiate and sign a construction completion contract. Deputy Secretary Gibson told us that he was going to agree to all of those requirements the next day in a meeting with Kiewit Turner, which he did.

Kiewit Turner restarted the project and started working to get the subcontractors back to work on the construction.

Then the next delay, The subcontractors have not come back to the Project because they no longer trust the VA and Kiewit Turner to not shut down the project. only 700 of the original 1,100 have come back to the project, and this is causing new delays. They are waiting to see Congress pass Authorization and Appropriation bills so the Corp can negotiate a completion contract with Kiewit Turner before they will come back to the project.

So to your two questions in the letter inviting me to testify on behalf of Colorado's Veterans. There is a serious problem of back log for veterans to get appointments with the VA Doctors and Clinicians. It is not a scheduling problem. The schedulers can only schedule appointments when there is a room available and a doctor available. Getting the Medical Center completed will begin to solve the problem of shortage of patient and examination rooms. The completion of the facility will solve the first part of the equation.

But that is only half of the problem. One of the ways we have heard suggested to finance the completion of the Medical Center was to take away all bonuses for three years until the Medical Center is completed. Because of government regulations, the VA cannot pay the doctors and nurses salaries that are competitive with the private sector. They make up the difference with bonuses. If you take away the bonuses of the Doctors and Nurses, we could have a mass exodus of highly qualified and professional people. If that happens, then the problem of access will be worse! The schedulers will have rooms to schedule, but no doctors to schedule to examine the veterans in those nice new rooms. We can not allow that to happen.

The delays have obviously negatively impacted the veterans that need access to VA Health care with wait times that are totally unacceptable, and the Deputy Secretary has publicly acknowledged that it is unacceptable.

Prior to my retirement in 2008 I was a project manager for General Electric. What I have seen here is alarming because of that experience, but not surprising. I have some thoughts on future projects and how to control the

costs and delivery times and would be happy to discuss them with you.

In conclusion, this situation is not the fault of the Veterans, The United Veterans Committee of Colorado unanimously approved a position three years ago, and it continues today. We do not take sides with the VA, or Kiewit Turner, or Congress, or now the US Army Corp of Engineers. We want the replacement Eastern Colorado Regional Medical Center Built! We want it built with Quality! We want it built in the shortest time possible! And we want it built by Veterans. Like the shove pin says, BTDT, Build The Damn Thing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am available for any questions you may have.

Steve Rylant
United Veterans Committee of Colorado
President