

Senator Michael Bennet

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Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs
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Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Burr, and other members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to be a part of today's hearing. I want to start by thanking Senator Udall for his hard work on the new Denver VA hospital. And I would also like the Committee to know that Congressman Perlmutter in particular has been indispensable in getting this critically important project off the ground. My predecessor, Senator Ken Salazar, also worked hard to make this project at Fitzsimmons a reality.

When I came to the Senate just a few months ago, I joined Senator Udall, Congressman Perlmutter, and the rest of the Colorado delegation—many of whom have worked on getting this facility built for several years—in communicating to the new Administration my support for a stand-alone facility in the Denver area.

Secretary Shinseki told us he supported a stand-alone facility, and he and President Obama have included \$119 million in funding for it in their request for the upcoming fiscal year. This funding will put the \$800 million, 200-bed facility, which will serve 400,000 Colorado veterans, on track to open in 2013. When it does, ninety-two percent of Colorado veterans will be within one hour of VA primary care, and 81 percent of Colorado veterans will be within two hours of a medical center or health care center.

The new Denver facility will set the bar high. It will bring together the best resources the VA has to offer and enable more veterans to access the high-quality care they need and deserve. With capacity for addressing mental health needs and spinal cord injuries, it will be a shining example of how we can do right by our veterans—one that this Committee can point to for years to come.

As the Committee considers the President's budget for FY 2010, I ask on behalf of Colorado's veterans, that you preserve the \$119 million the Administration has requested for this important project. I also ask that when the time comes, you increase the authorization of the project to reflect its full estimated cost of \$800 million.

Congressman Perlmutter could tell you that getting to this point hasn't been easy, but he sets a good example for us all in standing up for our veterans. Of course, it is because of the brave commitment of our veterans that we can stand here today. Their sacrifices have created the need, and the obligation we all have to fulfill that need. I'm proud of their service to Colorado and to our country.

But it also takes leadership in government to make important things happen. I know the Chairman and the Committee reflect that leadership. So does Ed Perlmutter.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for allowing me to add to their voices..