

109TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 5870

To provide for the health care needs of veterans in far South Texas.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 24, 2006

Mr. ORTIZ (for himself, Mr. HINOJOSA, and Mr. DOGGETT) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To provide for the health care needs of veterans in far South Texas.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “South Texas Veterans
5 Access to Care Act of 2006”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS; DEFINITION.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

8 (1) The current and future health care needs of
9 veterans residing in the Far South Texas area are
10 not being fully met by the Department of Veterans
11 Affairs.

1 (2) The Department of Veterans Affairs states
2 that, as of January 1, 2006, the number of veterans
3 in Far South Texas is approximately 114,000.

4 (3) In its Capital Asset Realignment for En-
5 hanced Services study, the Department of Veterans
6 Affairs found that fewer than three percent of its
7 enrollees in the Valley-Coastal Bend Market of Vet-
8 erans Integrated Service Network 17 reside within
9 its acute hospital access standards.

10 (4) Travel times for veterans from the market
11 referred to in paragraph (3) can exceed six hours
12 from their residences to the nearest Department of
13 Veterans Affairs hospital for acute inpatient health
14 care.

15 (5) Even with the significant travel times, vet-
16 erans from Far South Texas demonstrate a high de-
17 mand for health care services from the Department
18 of Veterans Affairs.

19 (6) Current deployments involving members of
20 the Texas National Guard and Reservists from
21 Texas will continue to inflate projections by the De-
22 partment of Veterans Affairs of demand.

23 (b) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this Act, the term
24 “Far South Texas” means the following counties of the
25 State of Texas: Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Calhoun, Cameron,

1 Crockett, DeWitt, Dimmit, Duval, Goliad, Hidalgo, Jack-
2 son, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Nueces,
3 Refugio, San Patricio, Starr, Victoria, Webb, Willacy, and
4 Zapata.

5 **SEC. 3. MEDICAL CARE FOR VETERANS IN FAR SOUTH**
6 **TEXAS.**

7 (a) DETERMINATION.—Not later than 180 days after
8 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of
9 Veterans Affairs shall determine, and notify Congress pur-
10 suant to subsection (b), whether the needs of veterans in
11 Far South Texas for acute inpatient hospital care shall
12 be met—

13 (1) through a project for a public-private ven-
14 ture to provide inpatient services and long-term care
15 to veterans in an existing facility in Far South
16 Texas;

17 (2) through a project for construction of a new
18 full-service, 50-bed hospital with a 125-bed nursing
19 home in Far South Texas; or

20 (3) through a sharing agreement with a mili-
21 tary treatment facility in Far South Texas.

22 (b) NOTIFICATION AND PROSPECTUS.—Not later
23 than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
24 the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report—

1 (1) identifying which of the three options speci-
2 fied in subsection (a) has been selected by the Sec-
3 retary; and

4 (2) providing, for the option selected, a pro-
5 spectus that includes, at a minimum, the matter
6 specified in paragraphs (1) through (8) of section
7 8104(b) of title 38, United States Code, and the
8 project timelines.

9 **SEC. 4. PUBLIC-PRIVATE VENTURE FOR MEDICAL CARE**
10 **FOR VETERANS IN FAR SOUTH TEXAS.**

11 (a) PROJECT.—If the option selected by the Sec-
12 retary of Veterans Affairs under section 3(a) is the option
13 specified in paragraph (1) of that section for a project of
14 a public-private venture to provide inpatient and long-term
15 care to veterans at an existing facility in Far South Texas,
16 then the Secretary shall, subject to the availability of ap-
17 propriations for such purpose, take such steps as nec-
18 essary to enter into an agreement with an appropriate pri-
19 vate-sector entity to provide for inpatient and long-term
20 care services for veterans at an existing facility in one of
21 the counties of Far South Texas. Such an agreement may
22 include provision for construction of a new wing or other
23 addition at such facility to provide additional services that
24 will, under the agreement, be leased by the United States

1 and dedicated to care and treatment of veterans by the
2 Secretary under title 38, United States Code.

3 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
4 are authorized to be appropriated such sums as necessary
5 for a public-private venture project under this section.

6 **SEC. 5. NEW DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MED-**
7 **ICAL CENTER, FAR SOUTH TEXAS.**

8 (a) PROJECT AUTHORIZATION.—If the option se-
9 lected by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under section
10 3(a) is the option specified in paragraph (2) of that section
11 for a project for construction in Far South Texas of a
12 new full-service, 175-bed facility providing inpatient and
13 long-term care services. Such facility shall be located in
14 the county in Far South Texas that the Secretary deter-
15 mines most suitable to meet the health care needs of vet-
16 erans in the region.

17 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
18 authorized to be appropriated to the Construction, Major
19 Projects, account of the Department of Veterans Affairs,
20 in addition to any other amounts authorized for that ac-
21 count, the amount of \$175,000,000 for the project author-
22 ized by subsection (a).

1 **SEC. 6. SHARED FACILITY WITH DEPARTMENT OF DE-**
2 **FENSE, FAR SOUTH TEXAS.**

3 (a) **PROJECT AUTHORIZATION.**—If the option se-
4 lected by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under section
5 3(a) is the option specified in paragraph (3) of that section
6 for a project of a Department of Veterans Affairs-Depart-
7 ment of Defense shared facility to provide inpatient and
8 long-term care to veterans at an existing facility in Far
9 South Texas, then the Secretary shall, subject to the avail-
10 ability of appropriations for such purpose, take such steps
11 as necessary to enter into an agreement with an appro-
12 priate military treatment facility to provide for inpatient
13 and long-term care services for veterans at an existing fa-
14 cility in one of the counties of Far South Texas. Such an
15 agreement may include provision for construction of a new
16 wing or other addition at such facility to provide addi-
17 tional services that will, under the agreement, be leased
18 by the United States and dedicated to care and treatment
19 of veterans by the Secretary under title 38, United States
20 Code.

21 (b) **AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**—There
22 are authorized to be appropriated such sums as necessary
23 for a Department of Veterans Affairs-Department of De-
24 fense venture project under this section.

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