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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3603

January 8, 2020

The Honorable Russell Vought
Director of the Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought,

As you prepare to release the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, I wanted to be sure to contact you regarding my highest priorities. There is a clear and emergent need for improved accessibility to care in Oklahoma for our veterans, and it is critical that we prioritize two projects – the Tulsa Inpatient Facility and the Muskogee Behavioral Health Facility at a funding level of \$120M and \$29M respectively. These projects would utilize the Communities Helping Invest through Property and Improvements Needed for Veterans Act (CHIP IN) to combine private funding with government funding in order to build state of the art care for our veterans.

The Tulsa Inpatient Facility was included as a priority in Fiscal Year 2020 on the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) list, but had zero dollars requested. Without funding requested in your budget, Congress is unable to appropriate money for the project. Utilizing the CHIP IN program with the Tulsa project would allow for VA and the community to share services and practices, while providing veterans increased access to the healthcare needs of their choice without growing the VA bureaucracy and wasting taxpayer dollars.

With 115,000 veterans in the northeast region of Oklahoma, 68,000 are not readily served by a nearby VA hospital and would be well served by a new hospital in Tulsa. The new facility would benefit tremendously by its geographic location to, and partnership with, the Oklahoma State University Medical Center. OSU, as a university hospital, will have the capability to add 50 medical residents to the new VA hospital. As a result, wait times will decrease for veterans to receive needed medical care, medical treatment will be more progressive and the overall level of care received by our veterans will drastically improve.

OSU, in partnership with the state of Oklahoma, the City of Tulsa, The Anne and Henry Zarrow Foundation, and other private benefactors, have put forward a strong proposal for the VA CHIP-IN Program. This proposal is a true public-private partnership that will allow for accelerated construction by building the hospital in less than one-third of the typical VA schedule, direct proper site selection, and ensure the highest quality of medical care for Oklahoma veterans in need. With the resources to build the new inpatient facility in Tulsa, this would open the existing facility in Muskogee to be transitioned into a much needed Behavioral Health Center. This is a need and Muskogee could serve as a regional center of excellence.

At all levels of the VA we have heard nothing but support for these projects and the use of the CHIP IN authority. This opportunity is a much more efficient way for all of us to achieve our common goal of ensuring that those who have served so bravely are afforded the proper levels of care in a timely and efficient manner. If we do not act, we will miss a great opportunity to care for our veterans, provide critical resources and train the next generation of doctors all while saving millions of taxpayer dollars.

This is a top priority for me, and I urge you to give your personal attention and prioritize adequate levels of funding for the Tulsa Inpatient Facility and the Muskogee Behavioral Health Facility. I have enclosed a copy of the letter that I sent with my entire delegation to Secretary Wilkie regarding this matter. Should you or any member of your staff have any questions at all, please contact Don Archer, of Senator Inhofe's staff, at 202-224-1447 or don_archer@inhofe.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Robert Wilkie
Secretary of Veterans Affairs