

# Petition Pushes Silver Cross as Veterans Clinic

## VA Examining Feasibility of Converting Soon-To-Close Hospital

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – More than 2,000 hopefuls have signed an on-line petition to convert a Joliet hospital into a military veterans health care clinic. “To let the Department of Veterans Affairs know there’s community backing behind extending veterans’ health care services into the region,” noted Ryan Vanderbilt, spokesman for U.S. Representative Debbie Halvorson, D-Crete. “The petition will help us show community support for the project.” Those who haven’t yet signed the petition are urged to log on to <http://www.supportourvets.com> to do so.

“We want to make sure everyone has opportunity to fill it out,” Vanderbilt said. “There’s no specific deadline. But, when the signatures start slowing down, we’ll send the petition on to the VA.” Essentially, the petition urges the VA to transform Silver Cross Hospital’s soon-to-be-vacated building in Joliet into a veterans’ health care facility. “The idea is for the Veterans Administration to move into the old Silver Cross facility and use it for veterans’ health services,” Vanderbilt said. “Hopefully, we’ll be able to extend these services to accommodate even more veterans.” The petition notes the transformation would be a convenient location for area veterans, whose closest options now are Hines Veterans Hospital in Maywood and La Salle Veterans Clinic in La Salle.

Silver Cross Hospital is constructing a \$400 million facility about three miles east of Joliet, in New Lenox. The 600,000-square-foot hospital is scheduled to open next year. Because of the relative proximity of Hines, there are no plans to convert a section of the Silver Cross building into a veterans hospital in the future should the conversion to a veterans clinic be approved. “However, we could have mega-clinics for a great number of outpatient services, and that’s what we’re pushing for,” Vanderbilt said.

A VA assessment team recently visited the Silver Cross facility to evaluate the potential for converting it into a veterans health care institution. “It looked like an excellent facility to them,” Vanderbilt noted. “One that would meet their needs.”

At the Feb. 4 hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, it was noted the VA is interested in the proposal as a possible option, although no final decision was forthcoming at that time. VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki could announce a time line on the project when he visits the 11th Congressional District some time in the coming months, Vanderbilt said. The VA also will determine what needs changing and revamping in order to repurpose the Silver Cross building, which is located on a 50-acre site on Joliet’s east side, into a clinic facility.

In another veterans-related move, Halvorson is among sponsors of House Resolution 4632, a measure that would provide up to \$200,000 to upgrade and repair the meeting facilities of non-profit veterans organizations. The Revamp Act legislation would use existing funding through the Community Development Block Grant program.

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