

CONGRESSMAN JOHN SHIMKUS' OPENING STATEMENT

House Committee on Veterans Affairs
Subcommittee on Health
Legislative Hearing
10:00 a.m., Tuesday, December 8, 2015

Chairman Miller and Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brown and Ranking Member Brownley, thank you for the opportunity to come before the committee to discuss this simple, yet important bill and for taking the time today to consider it.

In my district, Danville, Illinois is a small town by most standards, with a rich history. It was the home of Dick Van Dyke, who grew up in Danville, and Speaker Joe Cannon, the namesake of the building we're in today. Two institutions Danville prides itself on today are the VA Illiana Health Care System and Danville Area Community College (DACC).

The relationship between the VA and DACC is an excellent example of two institutions working together to serve our veterans. The location of a VA hospital adjacent to the community college campus provides our veterans returning home a one-stop opportunity for medical treatment and help with benefits, while as well as the educational and training experiences that help them transition into a career in civilian life.

My bill, H.R. 3262, is simple. It allows the VA to transfer 0.6 acres of land from its property in Danville, in exchange for 1.06 acres of land currently owned by Danville Area Community College (DACC).

Swapping the land provides benefits to both the VA and the local community. The Danville VA has looked into the possibility of building a fence along its perimeter, but as the property lines are currently drawn, that boundary is not a straight line. Swapping these two small parcels will fix that problem, cutting construction costs should the VA choose that option.

The VA's current property that would be transferred includes a Carnegie Library that is more than a century old. The building has become so deteriorated and expensive to maintain that the VA has stopped using it, and it now sits vacant. DACC and the local community, on the other hand, see great potential for the library. With the generous help of private donors, DACC plans to transform the old building into an arts center. By swapping these parcels of land, we can relieve the VA of the burden of maintaining an old building, while providing the community with a historically significant location for a cultural attraction.

While small in terms of acreage, this swap is big in terms of benefits for the VA, Danville, and my constituents. I thank the committee for this opportunity and their consideration and look forward to working with you to move this bill forward.