

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you and the members of the committee for the diligence and patience you've shown in dealing with the Portland/Vancouver replacement hospital. I'm sure you'll welcome, as I will, a resolution of this matter. Last year when I sat here, I spoke in support of the VA's plans for the new hospital. Since then I've read hundreds of pages of additional reports, including one by your own Surveys and Investigations staff. Today I'm more convinced than ever that the VA's plan--and the Marquam Hill site--is the best choice for the health care of the veterans in our area--and the best for the federal taxpayer's dollar as well. Moreover, while the decision on where to build has put this new hospital in limbo, the need for it has become even more critical. The number seeking admission has risen and the present facility can't handle it. My office gets almost daily calls from patients and staff reporting current crises. Most often these problems result from physical plant breakdowns at the hospital--like the other day when a section had to be closed because a water main broke. I received a letter today from Florence Kogel who is currently a patient in the hospital in isolation following surgery. I thought some of her comments might be of interest: "...I see so many things that are in such drastic need here. The night before Easter in the evening we had a pipe break in the utility room and flood the whole front hall. No one was available to be called to know where to shut the hot water off. The nurse and two other girls got all the blankets, sheets and etc. to keep it out of the rooms. They worked for 2 1/2 hours and then the Fire Department came to our rescue. They had me look and I told them to call Rep. Duncan to clean it up. The next two nights they had sinks break in two different rooms...."

Today, Mr. Chairman, I want to introduce several witnesses who'll speak in detail about why the VA's plan makes sense. But first I want to recall a comment I made in testimony here last year. If an alternative to the VA's plan must be sought, I believe the best plan is NOT to simply move the whole facility to the Emanuel site. A better alternative from the standpoint of veterans' medical care is a smaller replacement hospital on Marquam Hill for acute care, a retention of the Barnes hospital in Vancouver, and an upgrading of the outpatient facilities in downtown Portland. In other words, Mr. Chairman, a functional split. It's not ideal; it's simply better than building the hospital in the wrong place. Mr. Chairman, my purpose is not to repeat the points I made last year, which are still valid. Instead, I want to introduce several of the witnesses you'll be hearing from: Mr. Ron Dreeszen, state adjutant for the American Legion who is also representing the United Veterans Groups of Oregon; Dr. Richard T. Jones, acting President of the University of Oregon Health Sciences Center; and Mr. Ira C. Keller, who is a recognized civic and community leader in Oregon, Chairman of the Board of Western Sales Company (a major wood products firm), and a member and immediate past chairman of the Health Sciences Center Advisory Council. The facts they are armed with in favor of the Marquam Hill site are compelling and convincing. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the committee for allowing me this opportunity to introduce these witnesses, and for your courtesy in listening to them.