

Congresswoman Maloney: What Is White House Aim?

Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) spoke by phone to a VA-sponsored hearing in Brooklyn on May 3, releasing a statement on CARES, "Is Planned Study Part of a White House Strategy to Close and Sell N.Y. Vets Hospital?"

Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (N.Y.) challenged the U.S. Veterans Administration under President Bush not to use a newly begun study on possible consolidation of Brooklyn and Manhattan VA Hospitals, as a thinly veiled strategy to slash health services to New York veterans, for a cash infusion to government coffers.

Maloney said: "While the Manhattan VA Hospital may sit on valuable real estate, the services it provides to veterans are priceless. The VA should be in the business of

serving veterans, not speculating in real estate. Veterans should not have to spend hours traveling so the VA can gain a temporary real estate windfall."

Stressing the essential unfairness of diminished health services to veterans while the country is at war, Maloney said: "At a time when U.S. military personnel are engaged in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and other parts of the world, it would be a terrible mistake to reduce veterans' medical services here at home. . . . Closing the Manhattan VA hospital would leave many veterans without the means to access treatment.

"The New York Metropolitan region currently has 1.3 million veterans, and veterans are being asked to wait for appointments at VA medical facilities. Demand for services is projected to continue to grow."

A letter signed by 40 New York elected officials opposing the closure or diminishment of the Manhattan VA Hospital, is at <http://maloney.house.gov/sites/maloney.house.gov/files/documents/olddocs/veterans/091503PrincipiLtr.pdf>.

But I think that is too much to hope for—keep them both open and put a lot of money into improving them both. I think the more winnable argument is, if one is going to close. . . . One thing would be to keep them both open, and then, round two would be, "let's fix them up better." But I think that is a lot to ask. One of the things PriceWaterhouseCoopers will deal with, is that neither site is big enough to handle the other. So if one were going to refresh and enlarge a given site, that would accomplish part of what you are saying.

EIR: You might want to consider part of what is revealed in these Congressional hearings, which is, that to paper over the shortfall in the current budget for the VA Hospitals, they are reallocating funds earmarked for maintenance and new acquisitions. So it would be interesting, given that kind of crisis, to consider whether any promised rebuilding will actually occur.

Glickman: Yes, but I think the process [CARES] can't actually be derailed. The PriceWaterhouseCoopers thing is the process, so if we are going to do something like that, it would have to pretty well be in that context.

EIR: Some political figures, like Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) and Councilwoman Margarita Lopez, have pointed to a desire for commercial use of this property, as part of what is motivating what some might say are proposals that made no sense at all. Can you say anything about such commercial motivations?

Glickman: I think that is all implied. All we know is that the property is valuable Manhattan property. Were it to be

available, I think there would be many potential users for it. Whether that is a driver, I can't tell you; I doubt it. I think it will enter into the discussion of what the economics of closing one or the other of the sites would be. But I would not think it is predominantly the main reason for closing one or the other.

EIR: What is coming in the near future? I understood the pace was moving rather rapidly.

Glickman: I think there are meetings of the CARES Commission. We are proceeding with the pace of the Commission. I think there is a meeting scheduled for early Fall, September. And I think that is when the PriceWaterhouseCoopers people present some of the models they have thought about and have them critiqued. And then three or four of them will be selected to develop more.

And we have a whole idea of "Save the VA," as you know, to try to exert whatever influence we can.

EIR: *EIR* founding editor Lyndon LaRouche has proposed a return to Hill-Burton [Act] standards in health care, with which I'm sure you are familiar. This would involve a massive increase in building of hospitals, and medical infrastructure throughout the country.

Glickman: This is a bit beyond me; it is such a big set of questions. I'm not sure I can do it justice—at this time I can't comment on the whole rebuilding of the health-care system. This is another subject, which I would be pleased to talk to you about, but it requires a lot of thinking, about making comments about such a big subject.