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New law to expand Veterans services in Northwestern Wisconsin

Up to 165 jobs may be created

(MADISON) -- A new bill signed into law today authorizes the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) to begin the initial steps that may result in the development of residential, treatment, and nursing care facilities for veterans at a Northern Wisconsin Veterans Center campus in Chippewa Falls, on the site of the Northern Wisconsin Center for the Developmentally Disabled (NWC). The bipartisan bill, [Senate Bill 205](#), was signed into law today by Governor Jim Doyle at a ceremony at the FCS Financial Services in Wausau. The NWC facility is currently being downsized.

"Veterans in northwestern Wisconsin ought to be able to obtain long-term health care and needed services in the region of the state in which they live," Governor Doyle said. "Not only does signing this bill into law provide improved access for veterans to receive the services they need, but it will create many jobs in the Chippewa Falls area."

The bill, authored by State Senator Dave Zien (R-Chippewa Falls), was passed by both the Assembly and Senate earlier this fall. "In a time when the legislature has come under criticism for being divided, this legislation represents an extraordinary effort of Republicans and Democrats alike coming together in unanimous support of our state's veterans," said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John A. Scocos. "I am proud to say today that the Governor and every single member of the state Legislature acted in unison to make this effort possible," said Scocos.

The new law authorizes the first step in what is hoped will result in the creation of a Northern Wisconsin Veterans Center campus at Chippewa Falls. Modeled after the Southern Wisconsin Center at Union Grove, the new center may eventually include a VA Outpatient Clinic, homeless transitional program, assisted living facility, skilled nursing facility, and might also include adult

(more)

day health care. The facility could also provide as many as 165 jobs, according to state government estimates. A large number of Chippewa Falls area skilled workers are being displaced as a result of downsizing of developmentally disabled services at the Northern Wisconsin Center.

In September, Scocos provided testimony on behalf of the WDVA before the federal VA Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission in support of such a new center on the Chippewa Falls NWC campus. In his testimony at the hearing, Scocos said, "The potential exists for continued expansion of the federal/state partnership programs."

"We believe that significant savings could be realized through a collaborative initiative, one that could provide nursing home care services, assisted living, transitional housing for homeless veterans, primary care and adult day health care," said Scocos.

"The long-term care needs for veterans in the northwest corner of our state are not being adequately met," Scocos said. "Expansion of the state home program to northwest Wisconsin could represent a win-win situation for both partners," he said. "We recommend this course of action be considered," testified Scocos.

WDVA will seek initial federal funding in early 2004 for a homeless transitional assistance program that would be located on the Chippewa Falls campus. According to department officials, long-term care projects will take additional time and effort.

The signing into law of [SB 205](#) represents the second major state bill passed within the last three weeks that expands benefits and services to veterans. On November 21, Governor Doyle signed into law Senate [Bill 170](#) (now [Wisconsin Act 83](#)), a bipartisan veterans omnibus bill that includes an expansion of state veterans educational benefits and an expansion of state veterans benefits eligibility to recently returning troops serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.