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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

We owe our veterans the finest in the way of medical care. One of my first acts as President was to consider the Quality of Care Survey which made recommendations for improvement in the Veterans Administration medical care system, and I am pleased that in the last two years we have been able to implement those recommendations. I have asked in my last two budget submissions for approximately 9,000 new staff positions for the medical care program of the Veterans Administration and I have also asked for over \$600 million for needed repairs and construction to assure the safety and quality of VA facilities. My 1977 budget request of over \$4 billion for VA medical care activities was a record high for the system.

I have considered the recommendations of Administrator of Veterans Affairs, Richard Roudebush, on another important step in our effort to provide quality medical care to our veterans -- the construction of eight major replacement hospitals throughout the country. The eight proposed facilities have been the subject of a series of planning studies conducted by independent contractors. These studies were undertaken in response to a Congressional expression that hospitals be built and were subsequently reviewed by the Administrator who gave me his recommendations as to the relative priority to be assigned to the construction of each proposed new hospital.

I have today advised the Administrator of my decision to proceed immediately to provide design funds for all eight hospitals. I will also seek construction funds in Fiscal Year 1977 for the two projects assigned the highest priority by the Administrator -- Richmond, Virginia and Bay Pines, Florida. To implement this decision I will shortly ask the Congress to provide an additional \$249 million above my previous budget request for VA construction.

I have also decided to seek construction funds for the other six replacement hospitals at the rate of two a year for the succeeding three fiscal years. These projects would be funded in accordance with the VA's priority ranking. In addition to Richmond and Bay Pines, the other locations are Martinsburg, West Virginia; Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; Little Rock, Arkansas; Baltimore, Maryland and Camden, New Jersey.

My actions today do not include decisions on construction details and the number of beds at each facility. These decisions will be made after further review and analysis.

Over one million people are served annually by Veterans Administration hospitals, nursing homes and domiciliary facilities. They deserve to continue to receive care of the highest quality and the latest in medical research. This requires adequate hospital facilities. The actions I am announcing today reflect my commitment that the nation's veterans be assured of the finest in quality medical care.

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