

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Last week Gov. Dave Heineman announced Kearney as the new location of the Central Nebraska Veterans Home. Kearney was chosen through a thorough and open bidding process to replace the current 125-year old Grand Island Veterans Home.

“This was not an easy decision,” Heineman said. “We have four outstanding communities who submitted outstanding proposals. The proposals were financially stronger and better than we anticipated.”

The other communities bidding, and the scores a Site Selection Committee gave them, included Hastings, 977; Grand Island, 889; and North Platte, 855. Kearney received a 1,033 score.

Nine principal categories were evaluated and each category was assigned a score based on an overall model of 1,200 points. Those categories included physical factors, utilities and infrastructure, cultural factors, environmental factors, community services, regulatory factors, workforce factors, community support factors and program enhancements.

Indications at present are that Grand Island will protest the decision with the state.

Even if the 225-bed long-term care facility is built in Kearney, that distance from Imperial seems to be a factor when area veterans are deciding upon care.

That’s according to Duane Todd, service officer for the Chase County Veterans Service Office.

“The problem with the (current) veterans home, you’re looking at 200 miles away from family and friends,” he noted. “Kearney is better but it’s still too far away. North Platte would have been better.”

Todd noted that the Western Nebraska Veterans Home is located in Scottsbluff, but is also a long way from home for some veterans.

Asked how many veterans from the area take advantage of a veterans home, Todd said he didn’t know. “I’ve had people start the (admission) process, but it still comes down to miles,” he said.

Todd questions the numbers of health care professionals Kearney has promised. The facility would employ over 350 full time positions.

The new \$121 million project, with an approximate cost of \$102 million for the facility, has both pluses and minuses, Todd said.

“It will be a new facility and all together on one level, and it’s 50 miles closer to here. Is it good for our veterans?” he asked.