



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

July 19, 2006



Commemorating 75 Years of Service

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

I am responding to your recent letter regarding the status of health care services provided to Walla Walla area veterans. I appreciate your concerns and continuing support for our Nation's veterans.

On July 7, 2006, I announced my decision to continue to provide services on the Walla Walla campus. Through the ongoing capital planning process, which includes discussions of funding and project timing, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is developing a detailed plan to place a new, state-of-the-art outpatient facility on the campus. My announcement was not meant to be a detailed description of how the facility would look, but rather, to provide assurance to Walla Walla area veterans of the continuation of services in their community.

In regards to community involvement, VA will continue to work in partnership with local officials, non-profit organizations and state and local governments to develop plans for the new facility. In addition, consistent with the Walla Walla Community Task Force Report, VA plans to explore the use of the rest of the campus for housing and other services for veterans as part of an overall campus master plan.

It is my understanding that the VA Northwest Health Network Director, Mr. Dennis M. Lewis, has had an ongoing dialogue with you and your staff regarding VA's unchanged commitment to retain healthcare services in Walla Walla. Furthermore, Mr. Lewis also provided further clarification at the Community Task Force meeting held on July 13, 2006, in which you participated for a time by telephone. With that in mind, I am happy to further clarify my intentions for the Walla Walla facility.

Please be assured that throughout the planning and implementation process for the new facility, services at Walla Walla will continue, as has always been my intention. Specifically, the facility will continue to provide nursing home care, mental health and all current outpatient services. As you know, acute

Page 2.

The Honorable Patty Murray

inpatient medicine services are currently being referred to community facilities, a provision which is not expected to change.

Because we have not yet determined the full scope of services to be provided at the new clinic, it is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of projected costs at this time; however a conservative estimate is \$250 a square foot.

I hope that this response adequately addresses your concerns. If you have additional questions please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your unfailing commitment to our Nation's veterans.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. James Nicholson', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

R. James Nicholson