

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

May 10, 2022

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Dr. Robert J. Fischer
Medical Center Director
Mann-Grandstaff Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center
4815 North Assembly Street
Spokane, WA 99205-6185

Dear Dr. Fischer,

Thank you for meeting with me virtually on April 29 to discuss the ongoing issues and recent rumors related to operations at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center. I appreciate that you and Dr. Boyd took the time to answer my questions about the hospital's current status and the best way to move it into the future.

It was great to hear from you that there are no immediate plans to close or reduce inpatient services at Mann-Grandstaff. Veterans are our nation's heroes, and they deserve red carpet treatment with timely access to quality care. Mann-Grandstaff plays a critical in providing that level of care to veterans in Eastern Washington, and it is imperative that the facility continues to offer a wide variety of much-needed inpatient and outpatient services for the men and women who have served our nation.

At the time of our meeting, inpatient services at Mann-Grandstaff were currently at capacity, with all 20 beds in use. Given the current demonstrated demand and the stated potential to expand inpatient care from 20 to 24 beds, I encourage you to increase capacity as soon as possible. Our veteran population is aging and dealing with more health issues now than ever, so it is critical to take proactive action to ensure veterans have access to care before an urgent situation arises.

Reopening 24/7 urgent care at Mann-Grandstaff must also remain a top priority. We are now five months past the initial target date that Secretary McDonough announced for the reopening of 24/7 urgent care. While I understand complications with COVID and the electronic health record (EHR) modernization impacted that timeline, the incessant delays further undermine veterans' confidence that they will have access to care when and where they need it most.

I continue to have serious concerns with delays in care and lost medical records due to complications with the EHR rollout. It was recently reported in the Spokesman Review that the system has been partly or completely down more than 50 times since it was launched. This has led to hundreds of impacts on patient care, with veterans experiencing unacceptable care delays for critically needed treatment. Veteran records have been deleted from the system, leading to lost prescriptions for crucial medications, appointment cancellations and delays, and other unacceptable lapses in veteran safety and care.

These items, and continued complications due to the EHR—including a 45-minute outage during Secretary Remy's visit to Mann-Grandstaff in April—highlight the need for the medical center to maintain staff, rather than pursue staffing cuts. While I understand there are no imminent plans to cut current staff, funding for positions that are vacated should be shifted to other departments, including urgent and inpatient care as needed, rather than being cut altogether.

Thank you again for meeting with me. I look forward to our continued work together, as I trust you will continue to make gold standard care for veterans at Mann-Grandstaff your top priority now and in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Cathy McMorris Rodgers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cathy" being the most prominent.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress