

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 27, 2006

The Honorable R. James Nicholson
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Nicholson:

We write to inquire on the application status for a new Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Northwest Washington state. The application for the CBOC was submitted by our region's Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN 20) in April of this year. Our understanding is that it remains in "pending status" at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), waiting to be reviewed by the Under-Secretary for Health, where it has been for some time.

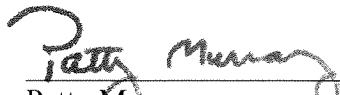
We have been and remain extremely supportive of a CBOC in Northwest Washington. A CBOC in this area will have the potential to bring necessary health care services to veterans from five counties – Whatcom, Skagit, San Juan, Island and Snohomish. According to the 2000 Census, approximately 109,000 veterans reside within this five county area. Many of these veterans have to drive over two hours just to receive basic care from the closest VA Medical Center, the Puget Sound VA Medical Center in Seattle.

Due to the region's geography, traffic congestion, and rising veteran population Northwest Washington needs more access to VA health care. Although the Puget Sound VA Medical Center is a state of the art facility that provides some of the best medical care, it cannot continue to be the only health care resource for veterans living 96 miles away in Oak Harbor, WA or 93 miles away in Bellingham, WA.

This CBOC is vital to providing increased access to health care for veterans in Northwest Washington and throughout Washington state. A CBOC in Northwest Washington will surely be the keystone in decreasing the large number of veterans traveling long distances to the Puget Sound VA Medical Center to receive non-urgent, primary care that could be provided at a CBOC.

The 2003 CARES report included a CBOC for Northwest Washington. We are hopeful that the Department of Veterans Affairs approves a CBOC for this area, and brings accessible, quality health care to veterans in Northwest Washington. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Patty Murray
United States Senator
Washington State


Rick Larsen
United States Representative
Washington State – 2nd District