

April 21, 2025

The Honorable Doug Collins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20421

Dear Secretary Collins:

I write to express my deep concern and dismay over the unprecedented refusal by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to allow VA Puget Sound to participate in a roundtable discussion on women veterans' health care this week in Seattle. The VA stated that participation by VA Puget Sound in my event was "not approved" as an outreach activity. Throughout my time in Congress, under both Republican and Democratic administrations, I have been able to have open and honest conversations with VA and engage with my veteran constituents in Washington state. However, this administration has proven to be vastly different—VA is now providing little to no information in response to congressional inquiries and VA providers are being prevented from getting the opportunity to hear directly from veterans about their health care experience.

As you know, one of Congress's main responsibilities is to conduct oversight of federal agencies, including VA, and in order to do so, it is crucial that we have access to VA sites, so we can directly speak with VA employees and patients. Over the thirty years I have represented Washington state, VA has approved and hosted countless outreach events with me, including roundtables, on VA property to talk about everything from the implementation of the *PACT Act* to VA's advancements in prosthetics care. All these events have been compliant with the Hatch Act. So, I was surprised and dismayed to find out this month that my office had been suddenly denied permission to hold a roundtable for women veterans to be able to talk about their own health care experiences, and concerns related to continued access to services. Furthermore, the VA provided no rationale to justify this denial.

This roundtable was designed to give providers, women veterans, and VA staff a chance to come together, in a space they all know and trust, to talk about the current state of women's health care and ensure an ongoing conversation on the importance of prioritizing gender-specific health care services at VA. Women veterans are the fastest-growing demographic in the veteran population, yet they are still having to navigate the realities of getting care at a VA that was not originally built for them. We owe women veterans the opportunity to have a say in how VA can best deliver their health care to them—and VA Puget Sound has a robust women's health program

that is worth showcasing. From the abrupt mass firing of tens of thousands of VA employees, to the refusal to meaningfully engage with Congress, I am left to conclude that this administration is committed to putting up barriers that only make it harder for women veterans—and all veterans—to receive the care they deserve.

Given VA's lack of transparency on the decision to deny my request to host a women veterans roundtable at VA Puget Sound, and my growing concern with VA politicizing constituent services and congressional oversight, I request answers to the following questions by May 16:

1. Plainly, why was the request refused?
2. At what level was the request refused –VISN, VHA headquarters, or by VA central office political leadership?
3. Was VA's refusal based in any way due to the due to the event's focus on women veterans?
4. Has VA approved outreach activities at other VA facilities since January 22, 2025 which have involved other Members of Congress?
 - 4a. If so, which Members, which facilities, and what is the distinction between those events and this planned event?
5. What has caused VA to shift away from its previous policy regarding hosting on-campus events?
 - 5a. Please provide a copy of the new policy, guidance, directive, or memo.
6. What does VA define as an "outreach" activity?
7. What would be considered an approved outreach activity?
8. Will Congressional visits, tours, or in-person oversight actions of any kind no longer be allowed?
9. What kind of in-person engagement will be allowable for the administration?

I appreciate your prompt attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patty Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patty Murray
United States Senator