

# VA will study hospital closures

SEATTLE — The Bush administration has ordered Veterans Affairs officials to study the possibility of closing VA hospitals in American Lake, Vancouver and Walla Walla, but a Seattle VA spokeswoman said the order is part of long-range planning and no cause for panic.

Sen. Patty Murray, in a letter of protest to the VA's director, said closing the state's facilities would "deny health-care access to thousands of Washington veterans." About 700,000 veterans and military retirees live in the state.

Local VA officials, who learned of the directive yesterday, said the order to study closures is part of an effort in every region to plan how many and what kind of facilities the VA needs in the next 20 years.

"There really are no final decisions being made," spokeswoman Jeri Rowe said.

Public hearings will be held later this year.

July 25, 2003, Seattle Times

Jul 30 2003

## Standing Up for Veterans, Murray Secures Commitment to Save American Lake VA Medical Center

*Secretary Principi makes personal pledge to Senator Murray to not shut down the facility; "I will continue to stand up for Washington state's veterans to fight any Administration efforts to break the promise of health care which these men and women have earned."*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) -- Today, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, called Senator Murray to respond to the Senator's concerns regarding the VA directive to examine closing three Washington state veterans' facilities at American Lake, in Tacoma, Walla Walla, and Vancouver. Senator Murray has called on Secretary Principi and the VA to abandon plans to close any VA facilities in Washington state through the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) initiative.

"Secretary Principi called me today with his personal pledge that American Lake VA Medical Center will not be closed. This is a tremendous relief for Tacoma area veterans and the many employees at American Lake," Senator Murray said. "I will continue to stand up for Washington state's veterans to fight any Administration efforts to break the promise of health care which these men and women have earned."

Under CARES, VA facilities throughout the nation were tasked with developing recommendations based on a thorough review of population data, market analyses of veterans' health care needs, the identification of planning initiatives for each market area, and most important, the significant involvement of stakeholders. Following the criteria and process set forth by VA, facilities made their recommendations to the VA Under Secretary for Health.

The Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN) 20, which oversees regional veterans' facilities in Washington state, had submitted a set of recommendations about VA facilities in the state. The report, sent to VA headquarters in Washington, D.C., noted a growing veteran's population and increased demands for primary and specialty care in Washington state. In response, the Department of Veterans' Affairs quietly directed VISN 20 to rewrite their submission to headquarters, with closure options for the three Washington state facilities.

Secretary Principi and Senator Murray also discussed Murray's continued opposition to closing the Vancouver and Walla Walla VA facilities. The Secretary vowed to work to ensure the CARES Commission will fully consider the importance of these two facilities as well as take input directly from veterans in Washington state.

"The Secretary now has a much better appreciation for the valuable services provided at both Vancouver and Walla Walla," said Murray, "and I will insist that veterans get the care they deserve. I still have serious reservations about the manner in which the VA is treating veterans, employees and the local community at both Vancouver and Walla Walla."

Last week, following the VA's surprise directive to study closure of the three Washington VA facilities, Senator Murray wrote a letter to the Secretary opposing the potential closure. On Monday, Under Secretary for Health Robert Roswell met with Senator Murray's staff to discuss the CARES process and the Washington VA facilities in jeopardy. VA General Counsel Tim McClain appeared before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on Tuesday, July 29th and refused to answer Senator Murray's questions about American Lake, Vancouver and Walla Walla.

Secretary Principi's call to Senator Murray followed the hearing.

"I appreciate the Secretary's telephone call and I take him at his word that Washington veterans will get a fair hearing before any of our facilities are closed," Senator Murray said. "The Secretary knows that I will continue to follow this issue very closely and I expect greater cooperation and transparency from the VA."

# Wyoming vets unhappy with VA switch to Batavia

**Posted: Thursday, February 23, 2012 12:37 am**

WARSAW — The impending closure of the Warsaw VA Outpatient Clinic has area veterans feeling they were kept in the dark.

The Veterans Administration announced Friday it will close its outpatient clinic at Wyoming County Community Hospital.

Services will move March 3 to the VA Medical Center in Batavia. The VA says the change will allow expanded services and hours.

Veterans in Wyoming County would rather see the clinic stay at WCCH.

“We’ve had a well-organized system down here,” said Ed Turner, 76, of Warsaw. “The VA’s done an excellent job in keeping us up with things. But this, with no warning to it — we got the notification last weekend.”

“If it goes away, it’s going to create an undue hardship on our veterans,” said Wyoming County Veterans Services Director Gary Cousins. “It’s an excellent clinic. We probably have about 800 veterans using it four times a year.”

The clinic opened in April 2004. It provides blood work and general health care for county veterans, along with some from Livingston and Allegany counties.

Veterans say the location has been handy and convenient. The longer distance has many worried.

“I don’t really see how this transportation issue is going to help the veterans, because it’s going to take them longer during the day for their appointments,” Cousins said. “Most of them, instead of spending an hour down here, will be gone three to four hours.”

Cousins and Turner said nobody’s told the veterans exactly why the clinic’s closing, or asked their thoughts on the issue beforehand. They’ve contacted state and federal legislators to see if the decision can be reversed.

But Turner said they’ve gotten few answers from Veterans Administration.

“At this point in time, naturally, I’d like to see everything stay status quo, but it’s not going to happen and we don’t know why,” he said.

In its news release announcing the closure, the VA Western New York Healthcare System said the changes will improve access. Officials said the Batavia location will be open five days per week, instead of two days weekly in Warsaw.

“A review of the current operations showed the 798 Veterans were mostly already using services at one of the other sites in our network, with Batavia being the most frequently utilized,” said VA Public Affairs Officer Evangeline Conley.

“More access to care and services is available at VA Batavia site,” she continued. “Primary care services are available five days per week and it also offers specialty services such as chiropractic care, dental, laboratory, mental health, and women's health, as well as other services.”

A total of 798 veterans used the clinic in the 2010-2011 fiscal year, she said. The changes are as a result of a standard review using national Veterans Health Administration Criteria.

Conley said the VA released the closure information as soon as the changes were approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

“The VA understands change is an adjustment and wants veterans to know that the same providers that cared for them at the Warsaw VA Outpatient Clinic will still provide the same compassionate, quality care at the Batavia site, and no employees have lost their jobs,” she said.

A free shuttle service is also being offered, with pick-up sites at four locations in Warsaw.

The veterans said their issue isn't with the VA itself. They're strong supporters but disagree with the Warsaw clinic's sudden closure and the lack of answers.

“I have nothing bad to say about the service we receive nothing,” Turner said. “I know not a veteran who could badmouth the treatment they receive at the hospitals or the clinics. Everybody is so cordial. It's unbelievable.

“It's just the decision they made to close our clinic with such short notice,” he continued. “That's my beef. If they had asked, or come out with a reasoning for it.”

Assemblyman Daniel Burling, R-Warsaw, is himself a veteran and against the closure. He said Batavia is more than 30 miles away, making visits cumbersome and inconvenient.

“I attended the opening of this clinic several years ago and was pleased that the VA saw value in the Warsaw location,” he said. “The outstanding medical attention and convenient location have been especially important to our aging veteran population. They have come to rely heavily on the services that are provided at the local outpatient clinic.”

Veterans who have any questions related to the transition of services from Warsaw to Batavia may contact 1 (855) 365-7984, Conley said.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 24, 2012

**SCHUMER, GILLIBRAND, HOCHUL URGE FEDS TO ABANDON PLANS TO CLOSE THE WARSAW VA CLINIC – LAWMAKERS SAY DECISION COULD HARM VETS’ ACCESS TO CARE, MUST BE RECONSIDERED**

*Following Announced Plans To Close Warsaw Vets Clinic, Lawmakers Urge Feds To Reconsider Decision & Keep Clinic Open for Local Vets*

*In a Joint Letter To VA Secretary Shinseki, Schumer, Gillibrand & Hochul Argue That Minimal Cost Savings & Negative Affect On Veterans In Alleghany, Livingston and Wyoming County Makes Decision To Close The Wrong Choice*

*Lawmakers: Our Vets Have Had Our Back, We Must Have Theirs*

Today, U.S. Senators Charles E. Schumer, Kirsten Gillibrand, and Congresswoman Kathy Hochul urged the Department of Veterans Affairs to reconsider plans to shutter the VA Warsaw Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Wyoming County. The lawmakers’ letter comes following the VA’s announcement that they plan to close the facility and consolidate services with the facility in Batavia, forcing local veterans who rely on the clinic to drive much further for basic healthcare. Citing the negative effect on veterans’ care and the minimal cost savings the closure would achieve, the lawmakers sent a personal letter to VA Secretary General Shinseki, urging him to abandon plans to close the clinic.

“Veterans from Alleghany to Livingston and Wyoming Counties rely on the Warsaw clinic for essential health care,” Schumer said. “Closing this clinic would place a hardship on brave men and women who have served their country with honor and distinction, and is no way to repay them for their service. I strongly urge the VA to keep this clinic open rather than forcing our vets to drive miles more for basic care.”

“Our veterans answer a call higher than any other,” said Senator Gillibrand. “They fight for our nation, and we need to fight for all the resources they deserve, including a VA worthy of their service. Western New York’s veterans rely on this clinic, and we can’t afford to lose it. It needs to stay open and available.”

“At a time when I am working to provide greater access to primary care for veterans living in rural communities, I am concerned that the VA has decided to close a clinic for those veterans,” said Congresswoman Hochul, a Member of the House Armed Services Committee. “I would ask for more transparency in this decision, especially the cost savings attached to this closing, and any health considerations given to forcing these veterans to travel over twenty miles for primary care.”

Last Friday, February 17<sup>th</sup>, the Veterans Affairs Western New York Healthcare System (VAWNYHS) announced unexpectedly that it planned to realign the existing outpatient health care services in VA Western New York Healthcare System (VAWNYHS) Warsaw Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) to VAWNYHS- Batavia VA Medical Center. It was

announced the Warsaw Clinic would cease operations on March 2, 2012 and all primary care services would now be offered only at the Batavia VA Medical Center. In place of the Warsaw CBOC, the VA also announced it would begin operating a shuttle service between Warsaw and the VAWNYHS Batavia campus which would be available to veterans free of charge and operate five days a week with four pickup points in and around Warsaw.

According to the Wyoming County Community Hospital (WCCH) where the VA leases space to run the Warsaw CBOC the current lease for the Warsaw CBOC is \$1,050.60 per month and WCCH is prepared to extend this agreement for at least six months without increased costs to the VA. Since the VA does not plan to cut any staff as a result of this closure, the lawmakers point out the extent of savings is relatively modest, particularly once the cost of the expanded 5-day shuttle service is factored into the overall net cost. Over the past year nearly 800 veterans received care at the Warsaw, NY CBOC.

Hon. Eric K. Shinseki

Secretary

Department of Veterans Affairs

810 Vermont Avenue, NW

Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

Last week, our offices were informed that the Department of Veterans Affairs Western New York Healthcare System (VAWNYHS) has decided to realign health care services provided by the VA Warsaw Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) to the VAWNYHS Batavia campus starting on March 3, 2012. As this clinic serves veterans in and around Alleghany, Livingston, and Wyoming Counties, we have heard from a number of our constituents regarding this matter. We respectfully request an explanation describing how you arrived at your determination and ask that you reconsider your decision to close the VA Warsaw CBOC.

Based on information provided by the VA, as well as the Wyoming County Community Hospital (WCCH) where the VA leases space to run the Warsaw CBOC, it does not appear this closure offers significant cost savings. According to the WCCH, the current lease for the Warsaw CBOC is \$1,050.60 per month and WCCH is prepared to extend this agreement for at least six months without increased costs to the VA. Since the VA does not plan to cut any staff as a result of this closure, the extent of savings is relatively modest.

In addition, under the announced realignment plan, the VA will be offering bus service to transport veterans free of charge to the Batavia campus five days per week, four times daily. Factoring in the cost of this service makes the net cost savings even more negligible.

For more than ten years, the local veterans community advocated for the establishment of this clinic to make certain veterans had greater access to primary care services. The decision to close this clinic will result in diminished access and less convenience for area veterans. We are concerned that an unintended consequence will be veterans forgoing primary medical treatment, which could lead to untreated illnesses. Offering more access to primary care lowers health care costs.

We believe that our area veterans should have greater access to primary care, especially if the cost to the VA is not overly burdensome. Once again, we respectfully ask you to provide us with a detailed explanation as to how you arrived at your decision. We also ask that you reconsider closing the VA Warsaw Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer

Kirsten Gillibrand

Kathy Hochul

Burling Fights To Keep Veterans Administration Clinic In Warsaw  
February 22, 2012

Assemblyman Dan Burling (R,C-Warsaw) is fighting to maintain local services for Wyoming and Livingston County veterans by demanding that the Veterans Administration (VA) keeps its clinic in Warsaw open. Hundreds of local veterans will be negatively impacted by the scheduled March 3rd closing of the Warsaw Community Based Outpatient Clinic.

“I am deeply disappointed that the Western New York VA Healthcare System has made the decision to close its Wyoming County Clinic. This clinic has provided our veterans with an excellent source of primary care that is nearby and easily accessible,” said Burling. “I attended the opening of this clinic several years ago and was pleased that the VA saw value in the Warsaw location. The outstanding medical attention and convenient location have been especially important to our aging veteran population. They have come to rely heavily on the services that are provided at the local outpatient clinic.”

Assemblyman Burling has written to United States Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, Congresswoman Hochul and the Chief of Staff at the VA Western New York Healthcare System to ask for an explanation and demand the retention of expected services for Western New York veterans.

Under the proposed closure plan, services will be transferred to the Batavia campus, with bus transportation provided for eligible veterans. Batavia is more than 30 minutes away, making this process cumbersome and inconvenient for veterans who rely on the primary services offered by the current Warsaw clinic. The clinic provides Western New York veterans with preventative medicine, psychotherapy (including drug- and alcohol-related issues), laboratory work for regular blood drawings, prescriptions and Radiology (chest, abdominal and extremity x-rays.).

“As a Vietnam veteran and a pharmacist, I understand the importance of providing basic healthcare services for my fellow veterans here in our local communities,” said Burling. “And I will continue to make the care of our veterans a priority.”

Constituents who support continuation of local health services for veterans may visit the VA’s website, [veterans.ny.gov](http://veterans.ny.gov), to voice their concerns, call Assemblyman Burling at 585-786-0180 or email him at [burlind@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:burlind@assembly.state.ny.us).

# **Hochul, Schumer, Gillibrand: VA Decision To Close Warsaw Clinic Doesn't Meet VA's Clinic Closure Standards – Urges VA To Conduct Further Investigation To Understand True Importance To WNY Vets**

Contact: Fabien Levy - (202) 225-5265

Mar 4, 2012 Issues: [Health Care](#), [Veterans](#)

***VA Decision To Close Warsaw Vets Clinic Is Not Cost Driven, and VA Overlooks Other Key Criteria That Should Be Factors In Clinic Closure Determination***

***In Joint Letter To VA Secretary, Lawmakers Argue That Clinic Serves Consistent Number of Local Vets, and That The Clinic Should Be Allowed To Grow In Size At Current Location Rather Than Shutter Its Doors – VA Would Realize The Benefits If They Took The Time To Learn More***

***Lawmakers: VA Is Jumping The Gun And Must Learn More About Warsaw Clinic***

Today, Congresswoman Kathy Hochul, U.S. Senators Charles E. Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand urged Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki to direct the VA to take another look at the benefits that the Warsaw VA clinic provides to Western New York veterans before closing the clinic. Following a briefing in which the VA presented its reasons for closing the clinic, the lawmakers today pointed out that the closure decision fails to meet the criteria that should justify the decision. The lawmakers note that the clinic serves a vast majority of veterans in the area, and has the capacity to expand to a larger size in order to meet the VA's standard for care. After the VA confirmed that the decision was not cost-related, the lawmakers are urging the VA to undertake a more detailed study of the clinic, which will demonstrate its importance to the local veterans community and could help in the fight to keep it open.

“The brave men and women who have served our country deserve both reliable and easily accessible healthcare, whether they live in an urban, suburban or rural part of this nation,” said Congresswoman Hochul, a Member of the House Armed Services Committee. “Instead of rushing to close this facility, I urge the VA to expand utilization of healthcare services in Warsaw and enhance outreach to veterans in the region.”

“The VA is acting like they're blindfolded, by not considering all factors and simply saying ‘shut it down,’” said Schumer. “We are strongly urging the VA to take off that blindfold, see the light, and learn every last bit of information about the Warsaw clinic. They'll find a local veteran's population that deserves care and relies on this clinic, a clinic that's ready to grow and

meet demand, and a clinic that deserves to stay open. Before the VA rushes to this foolhardy decision, I'm urging them to take another look and carefully consider the effects on our local veterans."

"Our veterans answer a call higher than any other," said Senator Gillibrand. "They fight for our nation, and we need to fight for all the resources they deserve, including a VA worthy of their service. Western New York's veterans rely on this clinic, and we can't afford to lose it. It needs to stay open and available."

In their letter, the lawmakers write, "The VA's analysis shows that over ninety percent of veterans who use the Warsaw CBOC are within a thirty minute drive. In addition, while the current clinic is only 1,100 square feet and does not currently accommodate the 3,500 square feet that the VA anticipates would be required for certain care, the VA has reportedly not inquired with the WCCH whether additional space can be made available. In fact, during the briefing and in the attached enclosure the WCCH CEO specifically affirmed that in light of recent construction at the hospital campus, he is confident that a suitable space can be offered for the CBOC which would accommodate the VA's needs.

"Additionally, last year the Warsaw CBOC served 798 patients, which is not a departure from previous years and is a utilization consistent with past performance. Still to boost future utilization, local veterans advocates contend that since these 798 veterans represent only a small fraction of the total veterans population in this region, utilization can be increased further with a greater outreach effort. Lastly it was revealed that while the VA analyzed various data in making this decision, the VA did not directly survey the veterans who use this clinic to determine where they would actually prefer to access primary care services. Based on communications to our offices from the local veterans community, this notably absent factor, would likely be revealing and germane to the VA's decision making process."

The text of the lawmakers' letter to VA Secretary General Shinseki appears below:

Hon. Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

In light of information presented at a briefing this week conducted by representatives with the Department of Veterans Affairs Western New York Healthcare System (VAWNYHS) for local officials, veterans stakeholders, and officials from the Wyoming County Community Hospital (WCCH), we write to underscore and elaborate on the letter we sent to you last week opposing the VA's decision to close the Warsaw Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC).

It was explained during the meeting that cost was not a factor in this decision since the current lease of \$1,050.60 is relatively modest. Rather, the VA evaluated several criteria including whether at least seventy percent of patients are within a thirty minute drive of the clinic, whether the physical size and configuration of the clinic supports the VA's patient care goals, the current and future anticipated workload, and the VA locations where veterans must now access care. Based on these criteria, we agree with the local officials who attended the briefing that the Warsaw CBOC currently meets or can demonstrate it meets these criteria with additional due diligence.

The VA's analysis shows that over ninety percent of veterans who use the Warsaw CBOC are within a thirty minute drive. In addition, while the current clinic is only 1,100 square feet and does not currently accommodate the 3,500 square feet that the VA anticipates would be required for certain care, the VA has reportedly not inquired with the WCCH whether additional space can be made available. In fact, during the briefing and in the attached enclosure the WCCH CEO specifically affirmed that in light of recent construction at the hospital campus, he is confident that a suitable space can be offered for the CBOC which would accommodate the VA's needs.

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Therefore, while we respectfully reiterate our opposition to this closure, we request that at a minimum the VA set aside any final determination until it conducts a preference survey with local clinic users and conducts due diligence with the WCCH to assess a more suitable lease space.

Sincerely,

Kathy Hochul

Charles E. Schumer

Kirsten Gillibrand