

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 17, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our significant concerns regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) recent recommendations to the Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission (the Commission) to close VA health facilities serving Nevada veterans. As Senators representing a state that is home to over 225,000 veterans, we strongly urge you to reject several of the VA's recommendations and carefully consider the impact that limiting access to VA care could have on our most vulnerable veterans.

On Monday, the VA released its list of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) facilities to modernize, acquire, and close, which includes the proposed closure of the Winnemucca and Laughlin VA medical facilities in Nevada, and the closure of the Diamond View VA Clinic in Susanville, California, located just across the state line from Washoe County, Nevada and also serves Nevada veterans. We are deeply concerned that the proposed closure of these VA health facilities would negatively impact local veterans, while also backtracking on the progress Congress and the VA have made over the past decade to improve care for veterans. The proposed changes could increase wait times for critically important medical appointments and increase the distance veterans will have to travel to seek care. While telehealth is listed as an option for care, some rural communities do not have access to a reliable high-quality internet connection, which could negatively impact access to telehealth. As our veterans' voice in Congress, it is our responsibility to ensure that they have access to the high-quality health care they deserve. Severely limiting Nevada veterans' access to care through clinic closures is unacceptable.

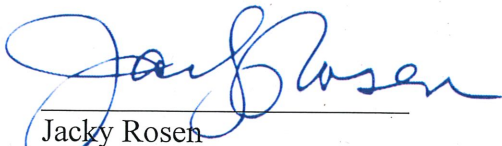
The Winnemucca VA medical facility is a pillar of the local community, and its closure would impose undue hardship on Nevada veterans. While new facilities are planned for Sparks and Carson City, these locations are over 150 miles away from Winnemucca, forcing veterans to travel an unreasonable distance to seek direct care from the VA. Furthermore, closing the Winnemucca VA medical facility location would also reduce the number of medical choices available to local veterans. Nevada already faces a severe shortage of doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals, and the Winnemucca closure would only exacerbate that problem. Likewise, while the Diamond View Clinic in Susanville, CA provides care to a relatively small number of veterans in Nevada, the VA health system must not leave behind the 1,082 veterans it serves in two states – whether they live in the town of Gerlach or on the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Reservation, particularly given rural Nevada's existing shortage of doctors and other medical providers.

Proposed changes in Southern Nevada also raise concerns. We understand that the proposed new facility just across the Colorado River from Laughlin in Bullhead City, Arizona could be an option for local veterans to continue to have close access to VA care. We recommend, however, that VA consider potential sites in Laughlin itself, and emphasize that it is critical that care remain available to veterans at the current Laughlin site until the new location is fully up and running – something not explicitly mentioned in the VA's recommendations. This will be crucial for ensuring that Laughlin's veterans continue to have access to care.

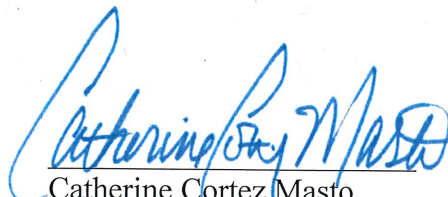
Community care is a wonderful option for so many of Nevada's veterans, but it should remain just that – a choice. Taking away the choice of VA care could leave Nevada's rural veterans without access to any health care at all. In addition to having to grapple with Nevada's doctor shortage, many of our veterans who receive care from these facilities face difficulties accessing public transportation to reach medical appointments because they live in rural communities. In fact, it is our understanding that some of the veterans served by clinics VA is proposing to close initially moved closer to these facilities because they needed to access veteran-specific care. The idea of pulling the rug out from under them by closing the only nearby VA facility is as cruel as it is misguided. Moreover, while veterans may have access to community care permitted under the *VA MISSION Act*, they will still require referrals and authorizations from the VA, which can be hard to manage and track, as well as frustrating and time consuming—not to mention potentially traveling longer distances to access veteran-specific care from another VHA facility.

With this in mind, we strongly urge you to closely review the VA's findings and not move forward with closures that could prevent Nevada's most vulnerable veterans from accessing the VA health care and services they deserve.

Sincerely,



Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

CC: Denis McDonough  
Secretary of Veteran Affairs (VA)