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Department of Veteran's Affairs
CARES Commission

Mr. Chairman and members of the CARES Commission:

My name is Jerry Cummins, currently serving as Mayor for the City of Walla Walla.

Other members of our community panel are:

Dr. Lou Anne Cummings, City-County Public Health Officer
Marilyn Galusha, Director of Nursing, Walla Walla Community College
Doug Bayne, Vice-President of Banner Bank and Graduate of Annapolis Military Academy and Decorated Military Veteran
Jim Kuntz, Director, Port of Walla Walla
Senator Hewitt is unable to be here today. Consequently, I would like to conclude our panel presentation in his place.

Fort Walla Walla was built in 1856, 147 years ago. The Veterans Administration Hospital was located in Walla Walla to provide a replacement for the loss of the Federal presence provided by the location of Fort Walla Walla in 1921.

The Federal Government must set an example of reuse of historic structures by funding restoration and adequate maintenance of aging facilities so that they can continue to serve the citizens. Re-investment in our Nation's historical structures reflects a respect for those who spent their time and effort to construct these facilities. Abandoning these buildings in a dilapidated condition to the local community would be irresponsible and would shift costs of restoration to the local communities.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to not abandon rural communities and the Veterans who live in or near them, like in Walla Walla, by closing rural Federal facilities. Statistics tell us that the Walla Walla Veterans Administration medical Center serves 12,000 patients annually from at least 18 counties in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

The Federal Government must make sure there are a sufficient number of rural facilities to support the population if the United States Metropolitan areas are attacked or evacuation is necessary. Eliminating service capacity in rural areas is inconsistent with maintaining a secure Home Land.

The existing Veterans Administration facilities currently operating in Washington do not provide veterans with adequate medical care and many Veterans must travel long distances to obtain such care. There are unacceptable delays and travel distances in the system that are not observable by people living and working in Washington DC.

The City Council supports the Federal Government's obligation to provide high quality medical care to the Veterans in Southeastern Washington. In Walla Walla, this means continuing to provide medical capacity at the Walla Walla Veterans Administration Outpatient clinic and Hospital to meet all of the needs within the area Veteran Community.

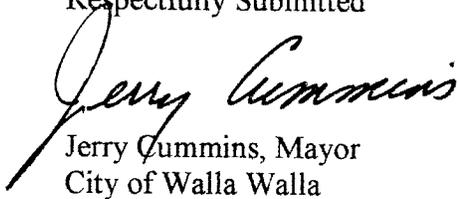
The City Council opposes closure or reduction in services at the Walla Walla Veterans Administration Medical Center and urges the Veterans Administration and the Federal Government to maintain and improve the existing facility and its operations. Consistent with the CARES study, the City Council supports the construction of a new out patient facility, a long-term nursing care facility in the community, and working with the City on construction of a columbarium.

In conclusion, the City Council supports restoration and re-use of historic structures. The Federal Government must set an example of reuse of historic structures by funding restoration and adequate maintenance of aging facilities so that they can continue to serve the citizens. Reinvestment in our Nation's historical structures reflects a respect for those who spent their time and effort to construct these facilities. The City Council opposes Federal abandonment of the Walla Walla Veterans Administration building and any action that would shift the costs of restoration to the local governments.

Attached to my written testimony presentation is a copy of Resolution No. 2003-75, passed by our City Council in open session early this year.

I will be glad to answer any question you may have.

Respectfully Submitted



Jerry Cummins, Mayor
City of Walla Walla

Resolution No. 2003 - 75

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE CARES PLANNING PROCESS AND DECLARING SUPPORT FOR THE WALLA WALLA VETERANS ADMINISTRATION SERVICES IN WALLA WALLA.

WHEREAS, Fort Walla Walla has been the site of a significant Federal facility since 1858 and the Veterans Administration Hospital was located in Walla Walla to provide a replacement for the loss of the Federal presence provided by the location of Fort Walla Walla.

WHEREAS, the Federal government in 1921 released the Fort Walla Walla property to the Public Health Service for development of a Veterans Hospital.

WHEREAS, the Federal Government has a responsibility to not abandon rural communities and the Veterans who live in or near them by closing rural Federal facilities.

WHEREAS, the Federal Government must make sure that there are a sufficient number of rural facilities to support the population if the United States' Metropolitan areas are attacked or evacuation is necessary. Eliminating service capacity in rural areas is inconsistent with maintaining a secure Home Land.

WHEREAS, the Federal government must set an example of reuse of historic structures by funding restoration and adequate maintenance of aging facilities so that they can continue to serve the citizens. Re-investment in our Nation's historical structures reflects a respect for those who spent their time and effort to construct these facilities. Abandoning these buildings in a dilapidated condition to the local community would be irresponsible and would shift costs of restoration to the local communities.

WHEREAS, the Federal government has an obligation to provide high quality medical care to the Veterans in Southeastern Washington. In Walla Walla this means continuing to provide medical capacity to meet all of the needs within the Veteran community.

WHEREAS, the Walla Walla Veterans Administration Medical Center serves 12,000 patients annually from at least 18 counties in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

WHEREAS, the existing Veterans Administration facilities currently operating in Washington do not provide veterans with adequate medical care and many Veterans must travel long distances to obtain such care. There are unacceptable delays and travel distances in the system.

NOW THEREFORE, the City Council of the City of Walla Walla do resolve as follows:

The City Council supports the Federal Government's obligation to provide high quality medical care to the Veterans in Southeastern Washington. In Walla Walla this means continuing to provide medical capacity at the Walla Walla Veterans Administration Out-patient clinic and Hospital to meet all of the needs within the area Veteran community.

The City Council opposes closure or reduction in services at the Walla Walla Veterans Administration Medical Center and urges the Veterans Administration and the Federal Government to maintain and improve the existing facility and its operations. Consistent with the CARES study the City Council supports the construction of a new out patient facility, a long-term nursing care facility or capacity in the community, and working with the City on construction of a columbarium.

The City Council supports restoration and re-use of historic structures. The Federal Government must set an example of reuse of historic structures by funding restoration and adequate maintenance of aging facilities so that they can continue to serve the citizens. Re-investment in our Nation's historical structures reflects a respect for those who spent their time and effort to construct these facilities. The Council opposes Federal abandonment of the Walla Walla Veterans Administration buildings and any action that would shift the costs of restoration to the local governments.

PASSED by the City Council of the City of Walla Walla, Washington, this

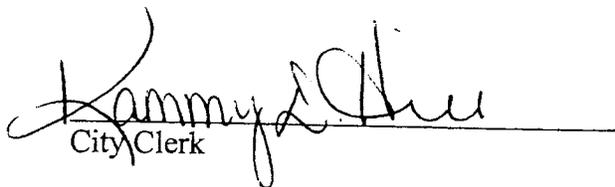
27th day of August, 2003.



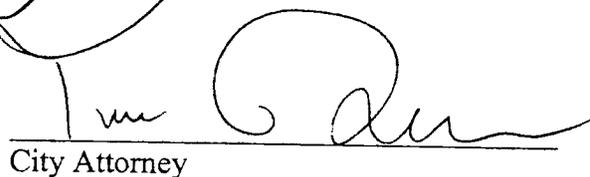
Mayor

Approved as to form:

Attest:



City Clerk



City Attorney

(H)

Department of Veteran's Affairs
CARES Commission

Our Community Panel believes very strongly the Veteran deserves competent medical care. Veterans have served our Nation well, and deserve to be treated well in return.

In early September, I and three other members of the Walla Walla Community had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Jay L. Halpern, Acting Director for CARES Program for the Veterans Health Administration in Washington DC, to discuss issues relating to the CARES process.

Our discussion was good and he pointed out several items I would like to call to your attention. First, he pointed out to us in a handout which I have, that the Vision Market Plan intends to:

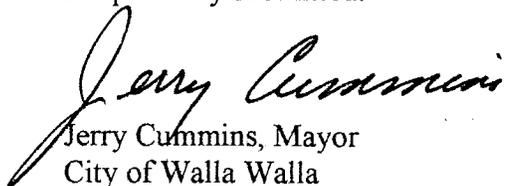
- **Propose contracting out medicine and psychiatry and as a result, improve travel time for most patients.** As you have heard from Dr. Cummings, Psychiatric services are not available in our area. Also, travel in Southeast Washington can be difficult in comparison to metropolitan areas.
- Has identified lead paint issues throughout campus and poor facility conditions scores particularly in medicine areas of Walla Walla. The condition of our facilities is a direct result of the Veterans Administration "passing Walla Walla over" for routine maintenance and this historic facility should not be "punished" for earlier lack of capital improvements by the Veterans Administration.

It is my understanding from Mr. Halpern the CARES Commission will not receive the Veterans Affairs report about facilities and services which might be available to serve Veterans in Washington State until October 15th, considerably later than this Commission hearing.

I ask the CARES Commission today to use an open process of decision making that will affect the health care of Veterans in Southeast Washington served by this Veterans Medical Facility. When the CARES Commission receives the Veterans Affairs report about facilities and services available to Veterans in Southeast Washington, I ask you to reconvene your Commission panel and openly discuss the affects on Veterans. If an open process is not available to the citizens of Southeast Washington to dialogue with the CARES Commission following receipt of additional materials, I openly ask our Congressional Delegation to hold Congressional Hearings in Walla Walla with ample seating so all citizens who are interested can participate.

In conclusion, the Federal government has an obligation to provide high quality medical care to the Veterans in Southeastern Washington. In Walla Walla, this means continuing to provide medical capacity to meet all the needs within the Veteran community.

Respectfully submitted.


Jerry Cummins, Mayor
City of Walla Walla



Walla Walla Community College

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~~WALLA WALLA~~

September 29, 2003

To: Capital Asset Realignment for Enhancement Services (CARES) Commission

Re: Veterans Administration Medical Center, Walla Walla, Washington

Walla Walla Community College, along with the Walla Walla Community, supports the focus of the CARES Commission on improving access to quality health care while improving efficiency of delivery.

The CARES plan proposes several changes in services and facilities in Walla Walla that stimulate questions regarding future care for veterans in this catchment area. The status of the Walla Walla facility is mentioned in the report as follows: "will maintain outpatient services and contract for acute inpatient medicine and psychiatry... and nursing home care" Chapter 9, p6.

The Walla Walla Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) serves as an educational partner with Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) (entry-level nursing), Washington State University (advanced practice psychiatric nursing), and Walla Walla College (social workers) in the support and placement of students as part of their clinical experience. Closing of inpatient services at this site would eliminate many crucial educational and training opportunities focusing on distinctive veteran needs. Such reduction of services will prevent rural veterans of this region from getting quality medical care they deserve and will jeopardize the training of more nurses for this community and region. Teaching our nurses to assist with challenges faced by our veterans is crucial to the improvement of health care for this unique and important population of patients.

Walla Walla Community College provides the majority of entry level licensed practical and registered nurses employed by hospitals and health care agencies in the Walla Walla Valley. The State of Washington recently funded a new Nursing and Allied Health Center on the WWCC campus because significant need is predicted to increase in the Walla Walla Valley. Additional grant monies have also been allocated to attract more students to the nursing profession. However, enrollment increases will be inexorably tied to clinical placements.

An even more important concern is the fact that those veterans who desperately need psychiatric services cannot get them, since no local hospital provides inpatient psychiatric treatment or medical detoxification services. The VAMC is the only inpatient psychiatric unit in this community. And the nearest inpatient psychiatric services (Lourdes Medical Center, Pasco) are very difficult to obtain and schedule in a timely fashion.

Access for student caregivers to inpatient psychiatric experience is crucial to providing them with training in multiple treatment modalities. And this educational experience will allow the next generation of health professionals to serve our veterans and general community with basic psychiatric needs.

The National Center for Workforce Analysis projects a critical nursing shortage that will grow to 42.6 % in the state of Washington by the year 2020. Other northwest states face even greater shortages. With fewer nurses and shrinking resources likely in the future, our veterans will need these services more, not less.

In Summary:

- 1) Veterans in our region need quality in-patient psychiatric and acute medical care.
- 2) Nurses-in-training need a variety of clinical experiences in preparation for future professional practice.
- 3) Our community needs more nurses now and during the next decade to meet the needs of Northwest veterans and local residents.

Submitted by:

Marilyn D. Galusha, MSN, RN
Director of Nursing Education