

March 15, 2011 □

WASHINGTON, DC— Today, Representative Peter DeFazio (OR-4) and Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR) sent a letter to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki insisting the VA explore different ways to protect veteran’s health care in Southwestern Oregon. The letter highlights the partnership between Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and rural health care providers and the successful recruitment of medical specialists in rural Oregon communities. They ask for “outside-the-box” thinking when considering the future of the Roseburg VA Medical Center (RVAMC).

The VA hired Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) to study options for the future of the RVAMC. In their preliminary list of options, BAH called for significant reorganization at the RVAMC based, in part, on the assumption that qualified medical professionals could not be recruited to live and work in the Roseburg area. In February, DeFazio, Wyden and Merkley sent a letter to Sec. Shinseki asking him to consider articles drawing attention to successful doctor recruitment in the Roseburg area. BAH recently submitted their final report to the VA, which Sec. Shinseki is currently considering.

The full text of the letter is below:

March 15, 2011

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

It has come to our attention that Booz Allen Hamilton's final report on the Roseburg VA Healthcare System has been completed and is in the process of being reviewed by the VA. Thus far, every option put forth by BAH has rigidly clung to the assumption that services must be jettisoned from Roseburg in order for the facility to survive. We contend that Roseburg needs outside-the-box thinking that leads to creative solutions to maximize services for veterans. Unfortunately, neither BAH nor VISN 20 appear to be thinking beyond their typical bureaucratic decision-making processes.

We recently became aware of the successful outreach and collaboration between Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and several rural health care providers. OHSU has a compelling track record of working with rural healthcare facilities across Oregon to help recruit and retain medical specialists and expand the services that can be offered in rural communities.

OHSU also has a successful and long-time collaborative partnership with the Portland VAMC.

This existing collaboration makes OHSU uniquely able to adapt their past successes with rural health care providers to meet the needs of the Roseburg VA Healthcare System.

Given their record of success, we ask that you invite the Oregon Health & Science University to collaborate with the Roseburg VA to look for the outside-the-box solutions the veterans of southwest Oregon deserve.

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OHSU has shown demonstrable results in overcoming rural health care challenges. Suffering from a lack of needed medical specialists, Mid-Columbia Medical Center in The Dalles, Oregon (population 12,000) partnered with OHSU to expand the medical services that they were able to offer in their small community. OHSU has now aided Mid-Columbia in recruiting two cardiologists by offering them research appointments at OHSU once a week while they practice and live in The Dalles for the remainder of the week. In a similar effort Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, Oregon (population 10,000) partnered with OHSU to bring cancer specialists as well as a cardiologist to Astoria.

Even as far away as Roseburg, OHSU has a strong and highly successful telemedicine agreement with Mercy Medical Center.

Given that the aforementioned success took place in civilian medical centers, it is important to reiterate that OHSU works closely with the Portland VAMC. Approximately 80% of the VA doctors at Portland have joint appointments as researchers or teachers at OHSU.

As well, a significant number of medical students and residents rotate between OHSU and the Portland VAMC for their training.

We don't think your impending decision is very difficult. You can accept the BAH report, permit service reductions at Roseburg, and disillusion thousands of veterans or you can allow Roseburg to partner with OHSU and explore ways to protect veterans health care.

Sincerely,

Peter DeFazio

Ron Wyden

Jeff Merkley

Member of Congress
Senator

United States Senator

United States

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