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Fort Harrison Veterans Administration Hospital

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the present consideration of the report?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the report.

Mr. PASTORE. Mr. President, if it is agreeable with the Senate, I should like to have a short quorum call. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PASTORE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, before the Senator starts, will he yield me about 2 minutes?

Mr. PASTORE. I yield to the Senator from Montana.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on November 10, 1969, I had a colloquy with the distinguished Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. PASTORE). The colloquy reads as follows:

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, before the Senator gets into the main part of his speech, I wish to ask a question about the Veterans' Administration hospital at Fort Harrison, Montana.

I have been receiving a number of communications from various veterans' organizations and individual veterans in Montana about the fact that the Veterans' Administration at Fort Harrison has closed a 40-unit wing, stating they could give a better service with the remaining facility. That may be true or it may not be true, but the fear on the part of veterans in Montana—and the State covers approximately 148,000 square miles—is that the Veterans' Administration is using this as a first step to close down permanently this 40-unit wing, thereby reducing the capability of Fort Harrison to take care of the needs of veterans in Montana. Can the distinguished chairman of the committee give me some information on this particular situation?

Mr. PASTORE. Yes. I would be delighted to do so.

This is still Mr. PASTORE speaking:

Mr. President, the distinguished Senator from Montana raised the same question at the markup in full committee. Pursuant to that statement, we had the staff check into it in detail. The staff took the matter up with the proper agency and the proper authorities therein. We have been assured that the particular wing is closed temporarily because of the lack of patients, but it is available and will be available, and it is not to be abandoned.

Mr. MANSFIELD. I could not ask for more of an assurance than that.

An assurance, incidentally, in which I believe the distinguished senior Senator from Colorado, the ranking minority member of the Appropriations Committee (Mr. ALLOTT), concurred.

Mr. ALLOTT. That is correct.

Mr. MANSFIELD. The colloquy continued:

On behalf of the veterans of Montana I wish to thank the chairman of the committee, the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. PASTORE) for his assurance that this 40-unit wing will not be abandoned.

Mr. PASTORE. It was a pleasure to make the inquiry and gain that assurance.

Mr. President, this morning at approximately 10:57 a.m., Dola Wilson called from Helena. He said that he went...
to Fort Harrison Hospital on Wednesday, November 14, be admitted and he was told that there was no bed. At that time, he said he had a driver and he asked the people at Fort Harrison if there should be a bed at Miles City, as he would have his driver take him there. He was told by Fort Harrison that there was no bed at Miles City.

He then applied for admission on Monday, November 17, but still has no bed as of this morning. Dola is a 40-percent service-connected veteran. He stated that, while he was not exactly an emergency case, he was quite sick when he went up to Helena last week. He has been staying at his daughter’s home in the meantime. Dola was told at Fort Harrison that they would pay for a motel room while he waited for a bed. He refused this.

He stated on the days that he has been up there, he would have been admitted, but another veteran similarly turned away for lack of a bed. I asked him if he knew who they were and how many. He did not have any names, but there were four of the names of any veteran who, if he knew of 10 that he knows of. He went up to the Veterans of Foreign Wars office and saw Robert Durkee, and he was told by Bob that Bob knew personally one Vietnam veteran who was not admitted because of the lack of a bed. I asked Dola to call Bob Durkee and ask him to send in the names of any veterans he knows who have not been admitted to Fort Harrison Hospital because of the lack of bed space. He said he would do this.

I called the Veterans Liaison office and told them of this situation, and I have received a call back from the Veterans Administration office. They are checking into this situation immediately, particularly in view of the information contained in the letter of November 14 which we just received, which I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the Record at this point, together with other letters having to do with the situation which seems to be developing at Fort Harrison.

There being no objection, the letters were ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

**Veterans’ Administration**

**Washington, D.C., October 7, 1969.**

Hon. Mike Mansfield,

U.S. Senator,

Washington, D.C.,

**Dear Mike:** I hate to take all these complaints from your inquiries in behalf of Mr. Lyle Jacobson, who wrote you concerning the Veterans Administration Center, Fort Harrison, Montana.

We have recently taken out of operation one hospital ward of 40 beds. This action was taken in order for us to have available beds for all eligible veterans because of the concentration of professional staff resulting from the reactivation of the Veterans Administration.

We shall continue to meet the demand for medical care at Fort Harrison Hospital and provide effective service to all eligible veterans.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Johnson,

Administrator.

**Hon. Mike Mansfield,**

**U.S. Senator,**

**Washington, D.C.,**

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Sincerely,

Donald E. Johnson,

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Mr. MANFIELD. I would express the hope that the Veterans’ Administration is not again, for a second time in 6 years, trying an end-run around the Senator from the State of Montana. We had an awfully hard time keeping the VA hospital at Miles City. We had an awfully hard time getting the necessary beds and the enlargement at Fort Harrison, and had looked to this committee to help with the VA nurses admitting veterans to the VA beds on the remaining wards.

We shall continue to meet the demand for medical care at Fort Harrison Hospital and provide effective service to all eligible veterans.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Johnson,

Administrator.

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