

Veterans, spouses and family members,

I'm a psychiatrist at the Santa Rosa VA Clinic. I am the sole remaining member of the original clinic staff, having come to work for the VA as the Director of Mental Health at the clinic when it opened in 1996. I was 36 years old then. Now I'm 65.

The VA could really use the help of all veterans and family. I was given the flier below today by one of our VA Police Department (VAPD) Sergeants who works at the Santa Rosa Clinic. It's an announcement of a National Day of Solidarity and Protest encouraging veterans to come to their local VA Clinic to show they are aware of and won't stand for the current and future cuts to VA benefits and medical care.

These cuts are real, indiscriminate and harmful. Prior to this week, over 1000 VA staffers were fired by DOGE. Among them were workers at the National Veterans Crisis Line, the VA's first line of defense in our National Suicide Prevention Program.

On Monday, 1400 additional VA employees were fired by DOGE nationwide, including staff in the San Francisco VA Healthcare System. Among those fired were two VAPD Dispatchers who worked at SFVAMC. We waited years to fill those two necessary positions; first to get the funding, then to try to convince good dispatchers to take a pay cut and become federal employees and join our mission, and finally, getting them onboarded. During all that time when SF VAPD had no dispatchers, a VAPD Officer manned the Dispatchers position when their expertise could have been better used elsewhere. Nationwide, veterans working for the VA who have "Above Satisfactory" and "Outstanding" Proficiency Reports are being fired by the VA. The VA's new Secretary, Doug Collins, has gone on record as saying no critical services were cut. VA employees know he knows he is wrong.

The Administration is talking out of both sides of its mouth. It has exempted the VA from the federal hiring freeze while at the same time firing every probationary (meaning they've been at the VA less than one year) employee.

You don't need to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows. You just need to read Chapter 20 of "Project 2025." In addition to the Veterans Health Administration side of the VA, the Trump Administration intends to make changes to the Veterans Benefits Administration, making it more difficult for veterans to get service-connected benefits. Other benefits will be reduced or cut as well. If you think you have problems with VA healthcare, just wait until you try to get decent care in the community. American medicine is broken. I would much rather get my care in the VA than in the community, and I have the absolute best federal employee health insurance available.

We cannot let this happen. I did not spend my entire career in a job I love to be made out to be a villain for being a federal employee, serving those who served. Veterans did

not serve our country to be treated with this level of disrespect by having sacred promises broken.

Veterans are just beginning to see what's going on and to organize. I think your voices are powerful. There are a few signs that the Administration knows they can't take you on and survive. Today we learned that some cancelled VA contracts were reinstated. Previously we were exempted from the hiring freeze and most of us were not allowed to participate in "The Fork."

Please answer my VAPD colleague's call to arms. He is a combat veteran himself and is still in the National Guard. He recently returned from his umpteenth deployment and we were so happy to welcome him back. Now he is looking for a job with a local county's Sheriff's Office.

Can you good people get organized to come to the Santa Rosa VA Clinic, 2285 Challenger Way on Wednesday, March 5th at 11 AM? Can you get the Press Democrat to cover it? I don't know if any of the local veterans groups are taking this on.

Thanks,

Emily A Keram MD