

State leaders celebrate renaming of Gallup veterans clinic

Written by By Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M.
Friday, 29 September 2023 04:07



Congress passed a bill on Sept. 18 that renames the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Community-Based Outpatient Clinic for the late Corporal Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura, who died on Nov. 29. The bill was sponsored by Rep. Teresa Leger Fernández, D-N.M. Senators Martin Heinrich and Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M., led the companion bill in the Senate. S. 475 previously passed the Senate and now goes to President Biden’s desk to be signed into law.

“The call of service is one that a select few among us choose to answer,” Leger Fernández said. “Hershey Miyamura chose to answer it twice. He volunteered to serve not only in World War II, but also in the Korean War, where he was imprisoned for 27 months after staying behind to protect his squad and allow them to escape from attack.”

Leger Fernández thanked her colleagues for passing the bill.

“I am grateful to my colleagues for passing this bill and honoring this hero. We will honor Corporal Miyamura’s memory every day by providing care for our veterans in Gallup under his name,” she said.

Heinrich also commented on the bill’s passing.

“Renaming the VA Clinic in Gallup is one important way we can continue to honor Hershey Miyamura’s courageous actions and brave sacrifices during the Korean War and his lifelong commitment to this community,” he said.

The senator also looked back on his own memories with Hiroshi.

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“I will never forget the interactions I was so lucky to have with Hershey over the years. I was especially proud to join him nearly a decade ago to cut the ribbon and open this clinic that provides vital health care services to veterans from Gallup and surrounding areas,” Heinrich said. “I hope that honoring Hershey’s memory in this way will inspire future generations of New Mexicans to learn more about his life and the powerful example of humble patriotism that he left behind as his enduring legacy,”

Luján shared the importance the VA Clinic would continue to have for the people of Gallup.

“I’m proud our legislation to honor Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura’s legacy passed the House and Senate and will be signed into law. By renaming Gallup’s VA Clinic after Hershey, we show a small token of gratitude for the true American hero he was,” Luján said. “As a Korean War Medal of Honor Recipient, a father, mentor, and friend, Hershey’s legacy represents the very best of New Mexico. From his time serving our country, to working in the community of Gallup, his work ethic and selflessness was admired by all who were fortunate enough to know him.”

Hiroshi’s children Mike and Pat Miyamura, and Kelly Hildahl, are supportive of the legislation.

“We thank Senators Heinrich and Luján for introducing legislation to rename Gallup’s VA Clinic after our father Hiroshi ‘Hershey’ Miyamura. It would be an honor and a privilege to have his name associated with such a wonderful and needed service for our military veterans in Gallup and surrounding areas,” they said upon the introduction of the bill.

A second generation Japanese American, Hiroshi first volunteered for the U.S. Army near the end of World War II. He did so at a time when many of his fellow Japanese Americans, including his future wife, were detained in American internment camps. He enlisted in the 442nd Infantry Regiment, which was composed of soldiers with Japanese ancestry and became one of the most decorated units in U.S. military history.

Following the start of the Korean War in 1950, the Army recalled Hiroshi, who had remained in the Reserves, back into active duty. During an overnight firefight from April 24–25, 1951, then-Corporal Miyamura covered the withdrawal of his entire company from advancing enemy

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forces as a machine gun squad leader. His selfless actions that night allowed all 16 of his men to withdraw safely before he was severely wounded and captured as a prisoner of war. Nearly two and a half years later, following his release and return to the United States, President Eisenhower presented him with the Congressional Medal of Honor in a ceremony at the White House.

After he received his honorable discharge from the Army, Hiroshi moved back home to New Mexico and opened up a service station along Route 66 in Gallup. He remained active in his community for his entire life, advocating for his fellow veterans and inspiring young people with lectures on patriotism, on faith, and on service.

Ken Riege, a friend of Hiroshi's and a U.S. Air Force veteran and a member of the Korean War Veterans Association, explained his friend's mission in life.

"I am so extremely honored to be asked to make a statement regarding the renaming of the Gallup CBOC Clinic after my dear friend and fellow Korean War Veterans Association Member Mr. Hiroshi 'Hershey' Miyamura," Reige said. "Hershey's main mission was to ensure his fellow veterans received the care they needed and earned and he would be so extremely proud and honored knowing that the Gallup Veterans Clinic will now bear his name and that this facility will continue his legacy and mission while providing the needed medical care to his fellow veterans. I am also very thankful for all the hard work of U.S. Senator Heinrich's office and staff for all they have done to ensure the Gallup CBOC stayed open and to bestow this honor upon our dear friend Hershey."

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