

Governor joins in celebration for new apartments, hospital funds

Gov. Steve Bullock joined in two celebrations Friday in northcentral Montana that included the opening of 38 homes for senior housing in Great Falls and to announce grant money to be used to upgrade a hospital in Fort Benton.

Missouri River Medical Center in Fort Benton will receive \$800,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to help the critical-access hospital do mechanical system upgrades to its aging facility, Bullock said.

“Our rural critical access hospitals are essential to providing the quality of life all Montanans deserve and literally save lives by providing emergency services,” Bullock said.

He said the funds will help Fort Benton keep good-paying jobs all while improving access to health care in this rural area of the state.

As a critical access hospital, the medical center must have emergency staff on hand at all times.

The grant will help fund the replacement of failing or outdated mechanical equipment, including emergency generators, a new fire alarm system, and a new heating and cooling plant, state officials said. Funding will allow the hospital to retain 65 full-time, good paying jobs.

The governor noted rural hospitals are at risk under the proposed American Health Care Act, which threatens to gut Medicaid and disproportionately harm states with significant rural populations, like Montana.

Earlier in the day, the governor attended the grand opening of 38 affordable

homes at the Voyager Apartments at 1630 Division Road, in Great Falls.

The apartments are for seniors and those living with a disability and funded by more than \$7 million from the Montana Department of Commerce HOME Investment Partnership and Housing Credits programs.

Bullock said Montana's seniors have helped to build the state and make it a place "we can be proud to call home."

He said the homes will provide a safe and affordable place for aging Great Falls residents.

The \$8.2 million Voyager Apartments will be home to Great Falls seniors aged 55 and older, and people living with a disability who earn less than 60 percent of the Area Median Income. That's an annual salary of about \$25,440 for a one-person household. The rental homes will remain affordable for at least 31 years.

The three-story residence includes accessible physical spaces and social supports to allow seniors and disabled residents to age in place in a setting that promotes independence.

The project was put together by Accessible Space Inc., a nationally-recognized leader in wheelchair-accessible housing. Other funding sources include the Great Falls HOME Program, US Bancorp, and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Chicago Affordable Housing Program.

For more information, visit www.housing.mt.gov or call 406-841-2840.