

# Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

# EARLY



# BIRD

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## National News Articles

### **Closing Walter Reed: Medical Care Imperiled, But Efficiency Seen**

Defense Today  
Dave Ahearn  
November 1, 2005

Walter Reed Army Medical Center, long the top-quality medical treatment facility for Army personnel including the most severely wounded combat veterans, will be closed with no assurance that alternative facilities will provide equal quality or quantity of treatment.

So says Mike Duggan, deputy director for national security/foreign relations with the American Legion, who questions whether Congress actually will provide funds to create equal or better hospital facilities at Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland and DeWitt Army Hospital at Fort Belvoir in Virginia.

The closing of Walter Reed is mandated under the just-approved Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) plan.

However, the closing of Walter Reed makes sense in that it might be difficult to modernize the aging hospital facility, given that there are restrictions on how high new buildings may rise in the District of Columbia, and given that Walter Reed couldn't easily expand its campus outward because it is in the midst of an urban area, according to Joe Davis, director of public affairs for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Walter Reed sits on 113 acres in the heart of the national capital, between Georgia Avenue and 16th Street. If the hospital closes, real estate interests likely would vie to build shopping centers, offices and tract housing on the site, a rare opportunity in the District of Columbia, where most land already is developed excepts for off-limits parks.

An ironic note is that the raison d'etre for base closures is that they supposedly will save money. However, closing Walter Reed would require \$988.8 million in upfront, immediate outlays to construct new hospital facilities in Bethesda and at Fort Belvoir, while placing Walter Reed in the ashheap is said to save only \$301.2 million over two decades.

In other words, closing Walter Reed is to cost, immediately, three times-plus more than any eventual savings.

But Walter Reed is outmoded, and large sums would be required to rebuild it at its present site, Davis, of the VFW, said.

Bethesda Naval has no height restrictions for upward expansion, and has ample land for erecting new structures, he said. Further, he said, a large portion of the military and veteran population in the Washington area is in Montgomery County, Md., and Fairfax County, Va., near the two sites where Walter Reed units would be moved.

But Davis voiced some concerns, nonetheless, saying that while Bethesda Naval has a Metro subway station directly across Wisconsin Avenue, there is no subway line near Fort Belvoir, a post served by a traffic-clogged artery, U.S. Route 1, marked by fast-food joints, gas stations and other businesses.

"Traffic's going to be horrible" for any patients heading to Fort Belvoir for treatment, he said. Duggan also made that prediction, saying that "U.S. Route 1 already is at capacity, and this (added medical-facilities traffic) will make it more difficult to get there."

"The VFW's biggest concern is that medical care has to be timely, with a seamless transition" from Walter Reed to the Bethesda and Belvoir facilities, Davis said.

A key criterion here will be whether the quantity and quality of medical care at the new locations aren't inferior to the care provided at Walter Reed, he said.

Throughout its legendary history, Walter Reed has treated presidents and war heroes, and an immense number of others, including military retirees and dependents.

The American Legion opposed the closure of Walter Reed in part because of concerns as to whether other facilities will be ready to take on

the heavy burden of the Walter Reed caseload, where 1.1 million out-patient visits were accomplished each year, Duggan said.

That's the quantity part of the equation.

Then, on the quality side, "severely wounded were returned to Walter Reed," Duggan noted. Typically, field hospitals that may operate in tents provide the most basic level of care for the wounded, and others. Then local medical units, such as post dispensaries, are a bit more sophisticated. Above that, major base hospitals such as DeWitt provide a large step up in medical capabilities.

But often, when severe injuries or rare or advanced diseases are involved, even those major hospitals such as DeWitt will recognize that they are reaching the limits of their abilities to aid patients, and send them to Walter Reed for care.

"We don't think it's a good idea to close any military medical center," Duggan said, much less a hospital that is at the pinnacle of Army medicine.

With a rate of 16,500 in-patient stays yearly at Walter Reed "far exceeding any other major military [medical] facility in the Washington area," Duggan said it is critical that other facilities such as Bethesda and Belvoir be able to handle this caseload well.

#### A Solution

Rather than take the BRAC approach of closing Walter Reed, it would make sense to renovate aging facilities at the premiere Army hospital, in a phased and gradual reconstruction, Duggan said.

That "could well be a lot less [expensive] than building a whole new hospital" at Bethesda, and another at Fort Belvoir, he said.

Another key factor: the fewer major military medical facilities sites, the easier it would be for terrorists to destroy them in some form of attack, Duggan noted. Concentrating medical facilities

in fewer places makes the job easier for terrorists bent on such an attack. Terrorists have attacked medical facilities in Iraq.

Duggan also questions whether Congress will appropriate the nearly \$1 billion for new facilities needed to replace Walter Reed hospital buildings, noting there are enormous competing interests vying for each federal dollar.

Competition for funding has become intense in this era of enormous federal deficits.

For example, the Navy is criticized because its next-generation DD(X) destroyer would cost \$3.3 billion each for the first two, and perhaps \$2.2 billion to \$2.6 billion for later copies. Lawmakers also have complained about \$14 billion for an aircraft carrier, including development costs, and \$110 million each for Air Force F/A-22 Raptor supersonic stealth aircraft.

If Walter Reed is to be ash-canned, Duggan said it is imperative that new buildings at Bethesda and Fort Belvoir be finished first. "Build it before you tear it down," he said.

There also could be a funding crunch within the military medical establishment, with active-duty military facilities competing for funds against money needed for new facilities of the Veterans Administration, Duggan said.

Elimination of capacity in low-cost, efficient medical facilities also may mean that those in the TRICARE medical program may be forced to turn to expensive private care providers, who may not accept such patients because TRICARE reimbursements to medical personnel and facilities are low, Duggan said.

For all those reasons, he said, it will be a serious misstep to close "the Army's flagship hospital."

### **Local News Articles**

#### **Local officials, developers vie for Gillem property**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Atlanta, GA)

Add Seymour Jr.  
October 31, 2005

Friday, Fort Gillem officials will picnic, cut birthday cake and hold the 5K Gillem Gallop run/walk in celebrating the base's 64th anniversary. But Clayton County and Forest Park officials are busy planning for the base's short future.

They are in the midst of figuring out just what they'll do with the 1,500-acre site that will cease being a U.S. Army base in the coming years.

"You don't normally have overnight, laid in your lap, 1,100-plus acres to develop," said Forest Park Mayor Charles Hall.

Fort Gillem is one of four Georgia bases that will be closed as part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure. The others are Fort McPherson just outside of East Point; the Naval Air Station Atlanta in Cobb; and the Naval Supply Corps School in Athens.

President Bush and Congress have accepted the BRAC Commission's recommendations that would close those four bases along with 18 others across the country.

A group of government and civic leaders has been quietly working on plans to redevelop the site after Fort Gillem is gone.

"But it's difficult for us to do anything yet," said Cradle Bray, the former Clayton County Commission chairman who now heads the Local Redevelopment Authority in charge of overseeing the transformation of the Fort Gillem property.

The U.S. Senate has a few more days to pass legislation to reject the BRAC recommendations, but that is unexpected.

Once that is final, Bray's group will begin formulating plans for the property.

The group won't get all 1,500 acres. Fort Gillem will still house the Georgia Army National Guard, an Army Reserve Intelligence Center, the

Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Red Cross and the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory.

"When I talked to [U.S. Army Garrison Commander] Col. Angela Manos, it appears that they're going to keep 450 acres of it," Bray said.

So far, the preliminary plan would split the remaining land into equal fourths for commercial, industrial and residential development and one-fourth untouched since it is unable to be developed.

Local officials aren't the only suitors for the land. Developers have also been clamoring for the base property.

But Hall said local officials have first chance at the land. Either way, the city would have ultimate say over the property since it will be in charge of zoning for it.

Bray said the next step will be awaiting final confirmation that the BRAC recommendations won't be rejected. Local officials will then do a market analysis on the property, followed by a comprehensive plan that would be submitted to the Forest Park mayor and City Council for approval.

"Mayor Hall once said Fort Gillem meant \$300 million to the economy," Bray said. "I predict once we get it developed, it will be three times that benefit to the economy."

### *Opinions/ Editorials*

#### **Still a BRAC winner**

Fort Wayne News Sentinel (Fort Wayne, IN)  
October 31, 2005

Because the U.S. House refused to reject the recommendations of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission, northeast Indiana will now be home to one of the largest F-16 Air Guard bases in the nation. (Scrapping the BRAC proposals would require rejection by both House and Senate). That means, among other things, more planes and more jobs.

But 3rd District Rep. Mark Souder is right to inject a note of caution. We won this round, but the "Air Force will be making substantial changes to its own resources and facilities . . ." The Pentagon is re-thinking all its deployments, and that could mean a basic restructuring of the Air Guard itself. Just because we're ahead right now, that doesn't mean we can stop paying attention.

### *Additional Notes*