

**The Honorable John O. Marsh Jr.**

**Opening Statement  
U. S. House of Representatives  
Armed Services Committee  
Subcommittee on Military Personnel  
June 26, 2007**

I thank the Chair and the Committee for holding this hearing to consider matters raised in the report of the Independent Review Group. This report addressed a number of issues on medical services in the Armed Forces, particularly at Walter Reed Hospital and to a lesser extent Bethesda Naval Hospital.

The Review Group was established by the Secretary of Defense on or about the 1<sup>st</sup> of March of this year and tasked to report by the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, which was accomplished. I would point out that the Review Group received full cooperation in the investigation from the Department of Defense, and all the Military Services.

I especially call to your attention the final report, which I feel speaks for itself. I hope you will study and read it because I think it will be helpful to you in carrying out your responsibilities as a Member of Congress with oversight and responsibilities for our Armed Forces.

Based on my experience of service and association with the American military, I am of the view that outstanding care of those wounded is a part of our national ethic. It is important we keep and add to this tradition of care, and reaffirm that America does take care of her wounded. We must ensure that we, as a people, continue to emphasize that ethic.

While not to diminish the role of the active force, we must remember and understand the hardships placed on our Reservists and Guardsmen by calling them to duty; they have special needs and we must be mindful of those needs.

Families! The men and women who serve – whether from the Active or Reserve components – have families who need our help, particularly when their husband or wife or child becomes wounded. We must help them.

Others have described what occurred **at Walter** Reed as the “perfect storm” The confluence of three forces that compromised the ability of the hospital to deliver to some patients the standard of care consistent with the traditions of its past. These forces were:

- 1 The unexpected casualty load of the Iraq War
  
- 2 The “contracting out requirements” imposed by the A 76 program, which is administered by OMB, and dragged on for over five crucial years
  
- 3 The decision to close Walter Reed pursuant to BRAC action.  
An action that was ratified by the Congress

It's important to note that there were two major dimensions of medical care that Walter Reed was delivering. One might be called “trauma” care and the other “holdover” care. Trauma care is treating the wounded soldier and goes from wounding on the battlefield to treatment at the hospital in Baghdad, thence evacuation by air-evac to Landstuhl thence on to the United States, often to Walter Reed for further treatment. Then on conclusion of hospitalization at Walter Reed the wounded person will be discharged from the hospital, or if out-patient treatment is necessary they will go into “holdover” status

The Review Group found the trauma care at Walter Reed was outstanding.

A position generally affirmed by the wounded patient, and often their dependents. However, the 'holdover care' was inadequate, and was the major source of the justified complaints there are a number of reasons for this inadequacy.

The IRG spent the majority of its effort looking at the systemic issues at Walter Reed and Bethesda, and made recommendations to correct those areas that we believed were substandard. The remedies to the problems associated with the medical community, including those within Physical Disability Evaluation System, are not confined to the Department of Defense. Servicemembers and veterans are also going to need the help of the Department of Veterans Affairs, OMB, and OPM to fully address all the facets of this problem.

Since the submission of our report I understand the Army has made a major effort to try and correct many of the deficiencies noted, and they will report to later in this hearing.

Ultimately, it is the Congress that can address and fix the shortcomings that exist in our medical services in order that members of Armed Forces can receive the care they deserve. You have the authority under the Constitution to raise and maintain the forces, including Militia, necessary for our National Defense. This will require commitment and perseverance to achieve, but it is vitally important. I am confident you will rise to the challenge.

Thank you and on behalf of the other IRG members present with me today, we look forward to answering your questions.