

## Pentagon urged to move Walter Reed patients to VA facilities closer to home

by Bend\_Weekly\_News\_Sources

WASHINGTON - The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) has called upon Defense Secretary Robert Gates to take immediate action to provide decent, sanitary housing for recuperating soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and to consider moving them to Department of Veterans Affairs facilities closer to their homes.

In a forceful letter to Secretary Gates, DAV National Commander Bradley S. Barton expressed the organization's concerns raised in articles published by the Washington Post about the appalling living conditions for wounded veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan while they undergo outpatient care and discharge and medical retirement out-processing at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

The articles document benign neglect affecting hundreds, and over time, thousands, of soldiers at what has often been touted as the Army's premier medical treatment facility.

"If the Defense Department can't or won't provide our injured soldiers with the decent living conditions they need and deserve, they should be given the option of moving to VA facilities closer to their homes where they can receive top-notch health care and rehabilitation services that will improve their quality of life," said Commander Barton.

The VA is well-suited to provide services to these soldiers and already has agreements in place with the Defense Department to care for military personnel. There are hundreds of soldiers being treated today at VA poly- trauma centers and other medical facilities as inpatients and outpatients.

Barton also noted that the VA consistently sets the benchmark for patient satisfaction, according to the American Customer Satisfaction Index developed by the University of Michigan Business School. The Institute of Medicine has recognized the VA as one of the best in the nation for its integrated health information system. And a comprehensive study by Harvard Medical School found that federal hospitals, including those run by the VA, provide the best care available anywhere for some of the most common life-threatening illnesses.

"Keeping our wounded soldiers on outpatient status in sub-standard living conditions for months or years is disgraceful and demeaning. No wonder many of them feel betrayed and abandoned by a government that claims to support our troops while leaving them to languish in moldy, vermin-infested housing," Barton said.

"The brave men and women who have served and sacrificed for our nation deserve to be treated with dignity and respect," Barton said. "It is a travesty to treat them this way when there are much better options available."

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