

**WALTER REED PRESS AVAIL
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Good morning, and thank you for coming.

I want to start by saying that, like many Americans, I was dismayed to learn this past week that some of our injured troops were not getting the best possible treatment at all stages of their recovery – in particular, their outpatient care. This is unacceptable and it will not continue.

I am grateful to reporters for bringing this problem to our attention, but very disappointed we did not identify it ourselves. Our nation is truly blessed that so many talented and patriotic young people have stepped forward to serve. The men and women recovering at Walter Reed and at other military hospitals have put their lives on the line and paid a considerable price for defending our country.

They should not have to recuperate in substandard housing, nor should they be expected to tackle mountains of paperwork and bureaucratic processes during this difficult period for themselves and their families. They battled our foreign enemies; they should not have to battle American bureaucracy.

To the best of my knowledge there have not been complaints about the world-class level of medical care these troops have received. The issues raised this past week are about out-patient facilities and administration.

These out-patient troops deserve a clean, relaxing place to recuperate from their injuries and ample assistance to navigate the next steps in their lives.

Today, I am announcing the formation of an Independent Review Group. This group, which consists of eight military, medical and political leaders, will take a broad look at all of our rehabilitative care and administrative processes at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and the National Naval Medical Center.

The members of this group are:

Togo West, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of the Army under President Clinton;

Jack Marsh, former Secretary of the Army under President Reagan;

Dr. Joe Schwartz, former Republican Congressman from Michigan;

Jim Bacchus, former Democratic Congressman from Florida, who is now at Vanderbilt University;

Retired General John Jumper, former Air Force Chief of Staff;

Retired Lt. General Chip Roadman, former Air Force Surgeon General;

Retired Rear Admiral Kathy Martin, former Navy Deputy Surgeon General; and

Retired Command Sergeant Major Larry Holland, formerly with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs.

This group will inspect the current situation at Walter Reed in Washington, D.C., the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, and any other centers they choose to examine. I have no information to suggest these are problems at Bethesda or elsewhere, such as we have learned about at Walter Reed, but we need to know the scope of this problem.

I appreciate the willingness of each of these men and women to serve on this panel.

The group will have special advisors in the areas of social work, rehabilitation, psychological counseling and family support issues. They will be given free and unrestricted access to facilities and personnel.

The group will report back their findings and recommendations within 45 days to the Secretary of the Army, Secretary of the Navy and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. Their report will be made available to the Congress and to the public.

A final point on the question of accountability. A bedrock principle of our military system is that we empower commanders with the responsibility, authority and resources necessary to carry out their mission. With responsibility comes accountability.

It is my strong belief that an organization with the enormous responsibilities of the Department of Defense must live by this principle of accountability at all levels.

Accordingly, after the facts are established, those responsible for allowing this unacceptable situation to develop will indeed be held accountable.

Thank you, and I'll be happy to take some questions.

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