

The House Armed Services Committee chairman, Rep. Ike Skelton, D-Mo., praised Harvey for stepping down.

"First-hand accounts and news reports of conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center's outpatient facilities are deeply disturbing, and in this instance, the buck stops with Army Secretary Harvey," Skelton said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called Harvey's resignation "further evidence of the administration's inability to competently discharge its responsibilities to those most deserving of the nation's attention."

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., who, with fellow Democratic Sen. Barack Obama, is sponsoring legislation to overhaul how the military treats wounded troops and their family members, thinks the wrong person resigned.

"I think the change that Secretary Gates announced today is positive, but the fact remains that the general in charge of the medical command knew of the problems and then diminished them when they became public," she said, referring to Lt. Gen. Kevin Kiley, who had been the Walter Reed commander until August.

"I agree with Secretary Gates that the doctors and nurses at Walter Reed are top-notch, but today's announcement does not go far enough," McCaskill said. Kiley, she said, "was responsible for the command culture that caused these problems and should be relieved of his command."

Committee questions

Some supporters have said Weightman was a fall guy for those higher up the chain. After he was fired, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform sought to have him testify, but Army officials refused to allow the general to appear before the legislators, who then subpoenaed him to a scheduled March 5 hearing.

Committee Chairman Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and national security and foreign affairs subcommittee Chairman Rep. John Tierney, D-Mass., said they want Weightman to testify about a memo written in September by Garrison Commander Peter Garibaldi to Weightman.

In a letter from the committee to Weightman, the members said the Garibaldi memo "describes how the Army's decision to privatize support services at Walter Reed Army Medical Center was causing an exodus of 'highly skilled and experienced personnel.' ... According to multiple sources, the decision to privatize support services at Walter Reed led to a precipitous drop in support personnel at Walter Reed."

The committee's letter also noted that Walter Reed awarded a five-year, \$120 million contract to IAP Worldwide Services, which is run by Al Neffgen, a former senior Halliburton official.

The committee also noted that more than 300 federal employees providing facilities management services at Walter Reed dropped to fewer than 60 by Feb. 3, the day before IAP took over facilities management. IAP replaced the remaining 60 employees with 50 private workers.

"The conditions that have been described at Walter Reed are dis-

graceful," the committee statement said.

"Part of our mission on the oversight committee is to investigate what led to the breakdown in services. It would be reprehensible if the deplorable conditions were caused or aggravated by an ideological commitment to privatize government services regardless of the costs to taxpayers and the con-

sequences for wounded soldiers."

The committee letter said the Defense Department "systemically" tried to replace federal workers at Walter Reed with private companies for facilities management, patient care and guard duty — a process that began in 2000.

"But the push to privatize support services there accelerated under President Bush's 'competi-

tive sourcing' initiative, which was launched in 2002," the committee letter states.

During the year between awarding the contract to IAP and when the company started, "skilled government workers apparently began leaving Walter Reed in droves," the letter states.

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