Hansen's Disease Center plan still indefinite on some details

By JOAN MCKINNEY
Advocate Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — Federal legislation transferring ownership of the Gillis W. Long Hansen's Disease Center in Carville to the state of Louisiana may be enacted long before anyone knows the real details of financing a plan to transform the complex for leprosy patients into a jobs-training center for at-risk teenagers and young adults.

Money from Louisiana taxpayers would be part of the financing mix, but how much money is not known.

A blueprint for the education mission — that is, how to get under-educated youths literate and jobs ready — also is not in place.

That is not to say that project boosters have ignored these critical matters. More than two dozen people have been involved in planning talks for several months. The principals are U.S. Rep. Richard Baker, R-Baton Rouge; U.S. District Judge Frank Polozola; two officials of the Greater Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce; commanders of the Louisiana National Guard; Cheney Joseph from the Governor's Office;

Some patients fearful but others are anxious to go

By CHRIS FRINK
Westside bureau

CARVILLE — For about 140 patients at the Gillis W. Long Hansen's Disease Center, a small piece of legislation pending in far off Washington puts their lives on the brink of change, a frightening prospect to many.

"This is my home until I die," Simeon "Pete" Peterson said. "I don't know anything about the outside."

For the last 45 years, Peterson, 68, has known no other home. He first came to Carville in 1951 as a 23-year-old from the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I'm going to be one of the patients who wants to stay because I can't take care of myself," said Peterson, who has little more than a thumb and index finger left on each hand.

The legislation, now in the U.S. Senate, would hand the Hansen's Disease Center's buildings and grounds over to the state for an education and training academy for troubled youth.

That prospect has the full-time patients, many of whom have lived inside Carville's gate most of their lives, in a stir.

Most patients, like Peterson or Johnny and Anne Harmon,
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hope the politicians and bureaucrats back up their promises to consider any patient's request to stay in Carville's familiar setting.

But I'm afraid it won't happen. We're not going to give up and go out and fight. We're just going to sit here in our cell and refuse to leave. And I might add, I'm scared. I'm not going to fight. I'm going to stay in here and wait for the others to come. And I'm going to live here and die here. I'm not going to leave. And I'm not going to leave. And I'm not going to leave.

This is a terrible nightmare that I can't wake up from. I'm here because I have to be here. I'm not going to fight. I'm going to stay in here and wait for the others to come. And I'm going to live here and die here. I'm not going to leave. And I'm not going to leave. And I'm not going to leave.

The Pendleton said they would sign up for the line of fire and the line of defense. We're not going to go out and go back. I'm afraid it won't happen. We're not going to give up and go out and fight. We're just going to sit here in our cell and refuse to leave. We're not going to fight. We're just going to sit here and wait for the others to come. And we're not going to leave. And we're not going to leave. And we're not going to leave.

Today, patients all enjoy some comfort at the center's new pavilion campus tucked into a bend of the Mississippi River about 20 miles northeast of Baton Rouge. They applied for the federal government for food, shelter, and medical care. The hospital has a state-of-the-art pavilion on the second floor of the pavilion, on one of several paired buildings or on the campus. They are not making a bed for the patients, and they are not making a bed for the patients. They are not making a bed for the patients, and they are not making a bed for the patients.

Simon "Pete" Peterson, shown in his room, has been a patient at Carville for 45 years and would like to remain there.

Key dates in the history of the Hansen's Disease Center at Carville

1904 - First seven patients were transported to what was then known as Indian Camp Plantation by a river launch from New Orleans.
1906 - Four Catholic Sisters of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul from Emmitsburg, Md., arrived to provide care for patients.
1906-16 - State of Louisiana founded many building improvements and reorganized the first covered pavilion at "The Island." This was a pavilion constructed in 1906.
1912 - U.S. Public Health Service takes operational control and "Hansen's Disease Center at Carville" becomes the U.S. Marine Hospital No. 66, the National Lepra Institution.
1913 - A patient, Stanley Stein, "Carville's Charwoman," dies the first issue of the "Daily Sun-Banner," a patient newspaper, later to become "The Island," an international publication.
1945 - Development of sulfone drug treatment by Dr. Guy Fager, the first effective treatment for Hansen's disease.
1946 - Carville patients given the right to vote.
1946 - Hospital becomes Mrs. G. W. W. L. and C. J. I. Hospital in the Louisiana State Board of Veterans Affairs.
1956 - Federal Bureau of Prisons opens mental hospital at the site.
1994 - Federal Bureau of Prisons leaves the site.
1995 - Carville Laboratory Research Branch at LSU in Baton Rouge receives a $3.5 million grant to test drugs against tuberculosis at the facility.

Advocate staff photo by Evan Ellis

The center began almost 100 years ago as a handful of squatted cajun, tumbledown antebellum plantation houses. The U.S. Public Health Service, first known as the Louisiana Leprosarium in the 1920s and eventually the first successful treatment of what came to be known, in a more...