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Major General Christopher Beck
Commanding General, MSCoE/Major General, United States Army
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Fort Leonard Wood, MO 65473

Major General Beck,

I write to express my concerns with the recent implementation of reduced hours to access the South and West gates of Fort Leonard Wood Base. I encourage you to reverse or revise this change to prevent any further harm to the counties surrounding the base.

The decision to reduce the hours for the South and West gates is resulting in tangible economic harm to the greater Fort Leonard Wood community that supports the base. I have heard from food service workers living nearby that may be forced to reroute their commute by 100 miles if the Highway 17 bridge over Roubidoux Creek is closed during the adjusted South gate hours – and the Missouri Department of Transportation expects the bridge to close for construction for 45 days in spring of 2025.¹ Furthermore, commercial truck drivers have approached me about having to drive a less feasible and more dangerous route on Highway 17 to access I-44, instead of driving through the base. Meanwhile, parents I represent have spoken to me about the South gate's importance as a crucial access point for students in nearby Plato, with a local school board estimating that 46 percent of their students are connected to active-duty military or civilian employees on the base. For my constituents, this change does not merely inconvenience them – it poses a threat to their livelihoods and families.

I also have concerns about your solution to provide emergency entry through the South gate. I appreciate your candor in acknowledging that reduced access to the hospital in the event of a medical emergency is a major flaw in this decision. However, the proposed solution to this flaw of having patrols respond to the South gate within 20 minutes could have life-altering consequences. Local patients who rely on the on-base hospital for care will experience a dramatic reduction in access to care, and, for certain health emergencies, this delay can devastate a person's health and can lead to death. For example, in the event of a stroke, a patient loses 1.9 million neurons each minute during which a stroke is untreated – which is why cardiologists coined the phrase “time is brain” to underscore the urgency of stroke treatment.² Meanwhile, 39

¹ <https://www.westplainsdailyquill.net/stories/modot-invites-requests-for-public-meeting-on-texas-co-bridge-projects.161829>.

² <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/full/10.1161/01.STR.0000196957.55928.ab>.

patients per 100,000 in rural America die from strokes,³ with 599 patients per 100,000 in rural America suffering from strokes.⁴ A 20-minute delay for a stroke patient, because of the need to wait for a patrol to open the South gate, actively endangers the life of a stroke patient or any other patient suffering from a significant emergency.

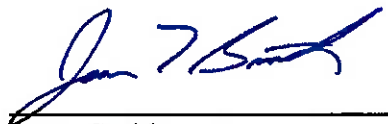
At a briefing with the local community on December 13, 2023, and at a townhall on January 25, 2024 that my staff attended, base personnel claimed that, due to a manpower shortage and depressed recruitment, the base can no longer maintain the South and West gate operations on a 24 hour, 7 days a week schedule. While the challenges that exist for Armed Forces' recruitment have been the subject of congressional scrutiny, I cannot accept that this alone is responsible for the restricted access, nor do I believe it is an acceptable tradeoff for the thousands of residents of the surrounding communities whose lives and livelihoods will be tangibly impacted. Further, the base's efforts to expand the hospital and construct additional barracks indicate that the base expects more, not fewer, individuals present on the base – making the argument to limit entry to the base even more murky.

In light of the implementation of the reduced operations at the South and West gates, I request responses to the following questions in writing by March 1, 2024:

1. What other solutions did you pursue on the base to better balance its mission while maintaining consistent access to the South and West gates? Why did these solutions fail?
2. Why did you choose to change the hours for both the South and West gates, rather than changing the hours for merely one of the gates?
3. Can you explain how the Trusted Traveler Program will maintain efficient entry to the base? Specifically, is there progress related to the pre-vetting online system?
4. Why was a maximum 20-minute delay to open the South gate in the event of a medical emergency deemed acceptable?

I look forward to receiving your detailed response and encourage you to reverse this decision.

Sincerely,



Jason Smith
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db417.pdf>.

⁴ <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/STROKEAHA.117.017089>.