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House approves plan for New Orleans charity hospital

The Associated Press | 06.15.07

By MELINDA DESLATTE

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Plans to build a new \$1.2 billion public hospital in New Orleans — to replace the charity hospital facilities flooded by Hurricane Katrina — received final legislative approval Thursday with a vote from the House of Representatives.

The approval, in a 70-33 vote, moves the hospital closer to secure \$300 million in federal funding to cover part of its construction cost. Legislative approval was needed before the state could seek to use part of Louisiana's federal hurricane recovery dollars for the hospital, which will be operated by LSU.

"It's time to build what I am confident will be one of the finest centers for teaching, research, and healing in the world," LSU President William Jenkins said in a statement, applauding the vote.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development must agree to the recovery dollar spending before the money can be used for the hospital. A HUD spokesman said the agency was reviewing the request but had no timeline for a decision.

As planned, the new LSU hospital would include 484 beds — a larger facility than the university operated before Katrina. Gov. Kathleen Blanco supports the construction plan.

Several Republican House members who voted against the plan questioned the size of the hospital and whether it should be so large.

Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Metairie, noted that U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-Metairie, has urged HUD to reject the state's request to use recovery money on the hospital until the state has further discussions about ways to restructure health care for the uninsured. Scalise said the state should settle on a comprehensive health redesign plan before approving a new charity hospital.

"Would we maybe be wasting our time and slowing our process by approving this?" Scalise asked House Speaker Joe Salter, D-Florien, who handled the hospital legislation in the House.

Salter said the state needed to move quickly to build a new public hospital in New Orleans.

Many GOP legislators have said that rather than rebuild a hospital nearly as large as the one damaged by Katrina, the state should funnel more of its money for uninsured health care to private and community hospitals that have provided much of the care since the hurricane.

Rep. Dan "Blade" Morrish, R-Jennings, said the state should have looked at building the new teaching hospital in Baton Rouge, rather than New Orleans. He said it would be a "more centrally located hospital which is better for the entire state and all our citizens."

But New Orleans-area lawmakers said a new charity hospital was needed to lessen the wait for emergency room care in the city and to train new doctors, nurses and other health workers for the entire state.

Rep. John LaBruzzo, R-Metairie, broke with his fellow Republicans to support the legislation.

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"My big concern is that if we stutter-step or try to negotiate the paths too much, we may lose the hospital altogether, and I think that would be devastating," he said.

LSU has restarted some of its services in a temporary hospital. It is planning to build the new hospital, which the university says will center on research, teaching and trauma care, as a joint medical center with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The university wants to use the \$300 million in federal block grants along with \$100 million in other federal recovery dollars to cover one-third of the new hospital's costs.

To pay for the rest of the hospital, LSU plans to borrow money by selling bonds to investors and paying them off with the dollars generated by the hospital.

Opponents said the state could be left on the hook to cover those bond repayments if the charity hospital doesn't make enough money.

A consultant hired by the Blanco administration said the proposed hospital could attract enough paying patients to pay off the rest of its construction debt once the facility opens in 2012, rather than relying on the state to cover its costs.

Any smaller hospital wouldn't have enough space to bring in paying patients and would have to rely on constant state subsidies, the consultant said.

<http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-32/118185564255570.xml&storylist=louisiana>

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House gives final OK on hospital The Advocate | 06.15.07

The plan to build a new LSU charity hospital in New Orleans to replace the one flooded after Hurricane Katrina received final legislative approval Thursday.

The state House of Representatives voted 70-33 on the plan that was necessary for the state to use part of the federal hurricane recovery money on the hospital. The Senate approved Senate Concurrent Resolution 76 on June 5. The Louisiana Recovery Authority earmarked \$300 million for the project with the caveat that the Legislature approve a business plan. The plan developed by state-hired contractors calls for a 484-bed hospital that would be completed by 2012.

"It's time to build what I am confident will be one of the finest centers for teaching, research, and healing in the world," LSU President William Jenkins said in a statement. "The vote by the Legislature, endorsing the business plan, is an overwhelming expression of confidence that LSU deeply appreciates."

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development must agree to the recovery dollar spending before the money can be used for the hospital. A HUD spokesman said the agency was reviewing the request but had no timeline for a decision.

House Speaker Joe Salter, who handled SCR76 on the House floor, said the state needs to accelerate building a new charity hospital in New Orleans.

LSU is planning to build the new hospital, which the university says will center on research, teaching and trauma care, as a joint medical center with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the Florien Democrat said.

Republican lawmakers questioned whether New Orleans needs a hospital of the magnitude being proposed.

Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, noted that U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., has urged HUD to reject the state's request to use recovery money on the hospital until the state has further discussions about ways to restructure health care for the uninsured.

Scalise said the state should settle on a comprehensive health redesign plan before approving a new charity hospital.

Rep. Dan Morrish, R-Jennings, said the state should have looked at building the new teaching hospital in Baton Rouge. He said it would be a "more centrally located hospital which is better for the entire state and all our citizens."

VOTING FOR SCR76 (70): Speaker Salter and Reps. Alario, Anders, Ansardi, Arnold, Badon, Baldone, Barrow, Baudoin, Baylor, Bruce, Burrell, K. Carter, R. Carter, Cazayoux, Chandler, Crane, Curtis, Damico, Dartez, DeWitt, Doerge, Dorsey, Downs, Durand, Fannin, Farrar, Faucheux, Gallot, Gray, E.J. Guillory, E.L. Guillory, M. Guillory, Harris, Heaton, Hill, Honey, Hunter, Hutter, Jackson, Jefferson, Kennard, Kenney, LaBruzzo, LaFleur, LaFonta, Marchand, Martiny, McDonald, McVea, Montgomery, Morrell, Odinet, Pierre, Pinac, Pitre, Quezaire, Richmond, Ritchie, Romero, G. Smith, J. D. Smith, St. Germain, Thompson, Townsend, Triche, Walker, White, Williams, Wooton

VOTING AGAINST SCR76 (33): Reps. Alexander, Beard, Bowler, Burns, Crowe, Daniel, Dove, Erdey, Frith, Geymann, Greene, Hebert, Johns, Kleckley, Lambert, Lancaster, Lorusso, Morris, Morrish, M. Powell, T. Powell, Robideaux, Scalise, Schneider, Smiley, J.H. Smith, Strain, Toomy, Trahan, Tucker, Waddell, Walsworth, Winston

NOT PRESENT FOR THE VOTE(2): Katz, J. R. Smith
<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/politics/8009222.html>

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House backs LSU hospital in N.O.

Times – Picayune | 06.15.07

By Jan Moller

BATON ROUGE -- Louisiana State University's bid to build a \$1.2 billion teaching and research hospital in downtown New Orleans cleared its final legislative hurdle Thursday, when the House voted overwhelmingly to direct federal hurricane-recovery dollars to the project.

The House voted 70-33 to approve a business plan for the project, which is expected to be finished by 2012 and would replace Charity Hospital with a 484-bed hospital that backers envision as a hub for treating the uninsured and training the next generation of doctors and nurses.

Senators approved the same resolution -- Senate Concurrent Resolution 76 by Senate President Donald Hines, D-Bunkie -- earlier this month, but the House was considered to be a tougher venue.

The state's plan, which would direct \$300 million in federal block-grant financing to buy land and start construction on the hospital, still needs approval from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which has final say on the use of such grants. A state "action plan" has been languishing at the agency since late April. A spokesman said earlier this week that the matter is under review.

Proposed VA partnership

LSU officials hailed Thursday's vote as a sign that the state is committed to moving ahead with a proposed partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to build adjoining hospitals that would share common features such as parking and food services. The partnership, announced in early 2006, appeared to be on life support earlier this year when the financing for the state's share of the project hit a snag and VA officials announced they were looking for alternate locations.

"The vote by the Legislature, endorsing the business plan, is an overwhelming expression of confidence that LSU deeply appreciates," LSU President William Jenkins said in a prepared statement.

Supporters of the project envision the hospital as a future hub for teaching and high-end medical care that could attract the paying patients who have traditionally steered clear of the Charity Hospital System.

Critics countered that the state will simply be rebuilding a system of public health care that is outmoded and inefficient, and a new hospital could threaten efforts to redirect Medicaid dollars that currently finance care for the uninsured into private insurance vouchers that the poor can use to seek care in other settings.

U.S. Sen. David Vitter, R-La., has met several times with HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson in an attempt to kill the project, and said earlier this week that he is optimistic that Jackson will deny the state's financing request.

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A question of size

Even critics agree that LSU needs a new hospital in New Orleans to replace Charity, the aging art-deco building on Tulane Avenue that was mothballed after sustaining severe flood damage after Hurricane Katrina. So instead of challenging the need for a hospital, they have challenged the size and cost of the proposed facility, which have exceeded the initial ballpark estimates.

"The question really becomes: What size should that be?" said Rep. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, who voted against the resolution.

The outside consultants who drew up the hospital's business plan have said the size is critical to its financial success. It must be big enough to draw the private-pay and Medicare patients who are critical to a healthy bottom line. With a smaller hospital, the beds would be filled with indigent patients and the hospital would have trouble generating enough cash to pay off its construction bonds.

According to the business plan, LSU will claim a larger share of the New Orleans-area market by 2016 than it had before Hurricane Katrina scrambled the region's health-care system. That plan assumes the new hospital will attract nearly twice as many paying patients as before the storm, even though the region's population is expected to be lower.

Current plans call for LSU to build 416 medical/surgical beds and 68 psychiatric beds, along with a Level One trauma center, that would sit adjacent to a 200-bed VA hospital on a 66-acre parcel bounded by South Claiborne, Canal Street, Tulane Avenue and South Rocheblave.

Timing critical

Andy Kopplin, executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, said speedy approval from HUD is critical, lest LSU lose its chance to partner with the VA.

"We're concerned that, absent HUD's approval and the state's ability to secure the site . . . that the VA might choose its self-described Plan B," Kopplin said. "And we believe Secretary Jackson needs to make sure Plan A is on the table."

A HUD spokesman said earlier this week that Jackson is still reviewing the proposal and offered no timetable for when a decision might be coming.

Should the federal government agree to put up block-grant financing, the state would still need to come up with about \$900 million for the project, which likely would mean selling revenue bonds.

In the interim, LSU is providing care through University Hospital, where 177 beds have reopened since Katrina. University officials hope to complement that service with several community-based satellite clinics to treat the poor and uninsured.

Private hospitals, meanwhile, are caring for a far larger share of uninsured patients than before the storms.

LSU's current plans call for opening an additional 10 beds at University Hospital to treat acute-care psychiatric patients, and 33 psychiatric beds at the former DePaul Hospital.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-8/1181887339144120.xml&coll=1>

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New Orleans residents ‘deserve better,’ marchers say

The Advocate | 06.15.07

By JOE GYAN JR.

Displaced New Orleanian Francine Lamothe and a hundred or so other New Orleans-area residents marched Thursday from the Governor’s Mansion to the State Capitol.

They braved 90-degree temperatures to turn up the heat on the governor and legislators to fix the cash-starved Road Home program and a host of other issues plaguing the recovery of southeast Louisiana.

“We’re American citizens and we deserve better. We deserve better treatment,” Lamothe, who has not been offered any Road Home money to rebuild her gutted home that took on 4%^o feet of water during Hurricane Katrina, said as she stood under a shade tree across the street from the Governor’s Mansion.

Lamothe, who lives in Baton Rouge on weekends and with relatives in New Orleans during the week so she can be closer to her job, said all she was offered was a \$30,000 grant to elevate her home.

“No repair costs. The money they were offering me was not enough to elevate anyway,” she said, adding that she has filed a Road Home appeal but has not heard anything further.

Lamothe and other residents said they are concerned about the projected \$5 billion Road Home shortfall.

“They said at first they had enough to cover everybody. What happened to that money?” she asked.

More than 21 months after Katrina, Lamothe said she just wants to go home.

“We like Baton Rouge, but New Orleans is our home,” she said. “That’s our main goal — to try to return.”

That sentiment was shared by many residents, many of whom rode school buses from New Orleans to attend the march and rally.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, officials from several neighboring parishes and community groups marched with the residents.

Marchers carried banners and signs that read “Re-Pave the Road Home,” “We Want Our Money,” “The Road Home is Blocked” and “Road Home a Road to Homelessness.” One sign said the Road in Road Home stands for “Recovery Overdue And Delayed.”

“This Road Home mess has led us everywhere but home,” ACORN’s Gwendolyn Adams said at the Capitol. “We are not refugees. We are citizens.”

Marchers also chanted slogans such as “Show me the money,” “No more excuses” and “Rebuild Louisiana, rebuild it now.”

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Marchers also called on state officials to use the \$3 billion state surplus on the state's storm recovery and to reduce skyrocketing insurance costs, find solutions to the current health-care crisis in New Orleans and the region, repair schools and dedicate funds to local governments to repair municipal infrastructure.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco responded to the march and rally with a statement, noting that \$5 billion in state money has gone to recovery since Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

"The recovery of every community in South Louisiana, from Lake Charles to New Orleans, remains a top priority for my administration and is a key part of my agenda during this critical legislative session," she said.

Blanco is heading to Washington, D.C., next week, partly to talk with congressional leaders about the Road Home shortfall. She has proposed using \$714 million on that shortfall — a mix of federal recovery dollars and reallocated state cash — and is asking federal officials to fill in the rest of the gap.

Nagin, on the steps of the Capitol, said lawmakers — particularly those north of Interstate 10 — were ignoring post-hurricane problems in south Louisiana.

"What's the difference between somebody who's from southern Louisiana and (somebody who's from) another part of Louisiana? There is no difference, and we should be treated the same," he said to a cheering crowd.

Lower 9th Ward exile Marenthia Lagarde, wearing a T-shirt bearing the headline "Man Made Disaster" and an aerial photograph of a barge that washed through a breach in the Industrial Canal floodwall and crushed her home on Jourdan Avenue, is living at her son's home in Algiers while she awaits Road Home money that will help her return to her beloved but devastated Lower 9th.

"Folks have forgotten about us," she said.

Lagarde — holding signs that read "Rebuild Lower 9th Ward Now" and "Send Help!" — said she was told last week after months of waiting that she will be offered \$105,000 in Road Home money. However, she was told it may be a month or two before she hears from a bank.

"I would love to go back," she said.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/8009167.html?showAll=y&c=y>

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Chicago doctor aims his arrow at LSU System presidency **GBRBR Daily Report | 06.15.07**

The latest public applicant to the LSU System president search committee is Edgar Ratcliffe Anderson Jr. M.D., a Baton Rouge native and 1964 LSU medical school graduate who's now president and CEO of Anderson Medical Consulting in Chicago. The search committee, in its first public meeting since November, discussed Anderson's application and those of other applicants during executive session.

Other public applicants include Bill Richardson, chancellor of the LSU AgCenter; Warren Jones, acting assistant dean for the College of Non-Traditional, Adult and Continuing Education at Chicago State University; Larry Lemanski, vice president for research for Florida Atlantic University; and Walter Wendler, an architecture professor at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, who was removed from his post as SIUC's chancellor last November. The names don't include an unspecified number of secret candidates being courted by Dallas head-hunter Bill Funk, who is conducting the search for a new LSU System president.

According to LaPolitics.com publisher John Maginnis, one of the secret candidates interviewed by Funk is retired Marine Corps Gen. Carlton Fulford, former deputy commander of the U.S. European Command and head of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies at the Pentagon's National Defense University. (Steve Clark)

<http://www.businessreport.com/archives/daily-report/2007/jun/14/161/>

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