



**The Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations
Invited Testimony – August 24, 2010**

**Senator Leticia Van de Putte, R.Ph., Chair
Senator Eliot Shapleigh, Vice Chair
Senator Brian Birdwell, Senator Wendy Davis, Senator Jeff Wentworth**

In the last five years El Paso has gone through a great transformation. The catalyst for this, as you well know, was the BRAC 2005 decision to increase the size of Ft. Bliss. In that respect El Paso was not the only beneficiary but the State of Texas has equally benefited by the large growth of the installation.

It is important to again emphasize that the Army (Department of Defense) has invested \$4.6 billion on programmed construction. If you could see a bird's eye view before and after of the installation you would see that a whole new city has been built on Ft. Bliss

An interesting projection is that by 2012 nearly 1 in every 8 people living in El Paso County will have a direct relationship to Fort Bliss.

Like most transformations across the state, transportation infrastructure has been a priority. As such the El Paso MPO and its associated partners have passed and have been implementing our regions Comprehensive Mobility Plan. Collectively, the Plan outlines approximately \$1.5 billion in highway and transit related projects with the objective to enhance our transportation network for the betterment of our community as well as the facilitation of commerce in our region. Our Comprehensive Mobility Plan is one example of our community's willingness to take on the mounting challenges associated by rapid growth.

Another large investment the community has made as part of our commitment to the Department of Defense to address their initial concerns regarding water shortage was to build the world's largest inland desalination plant. The Public Service Board (El Paso Water Utility) entered into a unique partnership with Ft Bliss in the creation of the plant which has the capability at maximum capacity to generate 26.5 million gallons of potable water per day. Currently, the system is operating at a small fraction of that number. Because of the new plant and the many other conservation programs that we have implemented, our community has more water than it needs for the foreseeable future.

All that said we face great challenges. Chief among them is the potential shortage of affordable housing. Although demand is currently being met within the next quarter we will test the limit to see if indeed we can meet the demands for all incoming soldiers. It bears reminding the new demographic of soldier is mostly ranked E5 and below. In fact 55% of the incoming population will be ranked E1- E5. Most estimates conclude that as a community we will be short approximately 7,000 housing units by 2013.

Considering many of the young soldiers coming to Ft. Bliss will have young families; quality education is a primary concern. El Paso taxpayers have approved nearly one billion dollars in bonds for school districts over the past five years. With an estimated 20,000 additional students, we knew we had to act to meet the demand. I would note that all of our school districts have continued to improve their test scores. Although, some schools have fared better than others, we have made great strides towards improving test scores and completion rates.

With the new medical school and growth of nursing programs at UTEP, Texas Tech, and EPCC, El Paso has worked to increase the supply of medical care providers from all categories. This extends to the mental health services, which allows us to be more proactive in addressing the needs of our service men and women and their families. It's no secret that many of these young men and women who have become part of our community have certain combat related mental health issues. Although the military has done all it can and will continue to do so, the state and El Paso share in the responsibility that all soldiers and their families receive the necessary care upon their return from combat duty, as well as when they leave active duty and reintegrate into the civilian world. Bottom line: We want to take care of our soldiers.

- Increased partnership between the civilian mental health system and the military mental health system is critical if the community is going to meet the increased need for mental health services—especially in the areas children's care, Spousal care and veterans.
- Our community continues to see increased number of incidences involving military families where mental health is an issue. These can encompass anything from suicide calls, substance-abuse related traffic incidents, family violence issues.
- El Paso MHMR, the local mental health authority, has been working to establish key relationships on and off Ft. Bliss to make the system more seamless for the military community.
- Governor Perry earlier this year released \$4.4 million in State grants to mental health centers to help veterans and families access mental health services. A portion of those monies were awarded to El Paso to initiate outreach programs.
- Several initiatives are up and running. El Paso MHMR has implemented peer-to-peer and family-to-family programs that are meeting throughout the city in health centers and VFWs. In El Paso the program is administered by veterans with combat experience who can speak to fellow soldiers about their own experiences and the importance of seeking out treatment.
- These grant monies were also used for children's services in collaboration with El Paso Independent School District, where mental health training and resources materials are being provided to military liaison staff at each of the seven schools located on Post.

- On the clinical side, El Paso has also experienced some successes. For the first time fifty private practice mental health clinicians are being trained in Cognitive Processing Therapy, the Army's preferred treatment modality for post traumatic stress disorder. This training will open up many more slots for soldiers and veterans to receive treatment in a community setting.
- The continued funding of veterans mental health outreach initiatives is crucial if Texas is to ensure access to services to veterans and service members returning from combat. We must establish protocols to facilitate partnerships and an exchange of information with our federal partners at the VA, William Beaumont and throughout Fort Bliss if we are to create a truly seamless system of care.

In closing,

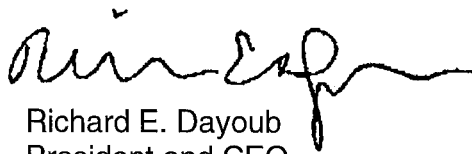
Among the State's greatest assets are our military installations.

In the same way that other Texas cities have grown from large corporate investment, El Paso's growth has been fueled by the growth of Ft Bliss and White Sands Missile Range.

We recognize that there are many challenges ahead but all the while we have demonstrated El Paso's commitment to growth and the development of great relationships. El Paso and Ft. Bliss are one community bonded by friendship and respect. The Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Army and numerous Army leaders have frequently used El Paso as the model community partner for all military installations across the country.

We appreciate the efforts of the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations. We hope that the testimony provided today will assist the committee members in determining in what areas the committee can best assist our military communities.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard E. Dayoub", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard E. Dayoub
President and CEO