

Molinari: 'I'm bitter, outraged, saddened'

USPHS to shut by month's end

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WASHINGTON — The effort to save the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital in Clifton collapsed yesterday when federal officials ordered the facility to stop accepting patients at noon and prepare to go out of business by the end of the month.

Congressman Guy V. Molinari received the news from Health and Human Services Secretary

Richard Schweiker in a telephone call to the freshman Republican's office here. "I am bitter, I am outraged, and I am saddened," declared the congressman in an interview later.

Yesterday evening, Barbara Thomas-Noble of the state Health Department said the state is considering legal action to block the closing of the Clifton hospital, based on what it alleges is a violation of the National Health Planning Act.

The act requires the federal government to ensure that patients in a closing medical facility are appropriately placed in other hospitals, something Ms. Noble says the Reagan administration has failed to do.

In addition, Ms. Noble said, the public health hospitals are designated medical facilities for American Indians under a consent decree signed by the federal government in response to a lawsuit. No provision has been made for alternative care for these citizens, Ms. Noble said.

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"There are all issues we are considering as part of a possible legal action," she said.

Schweiker apparently decided to shut down the Clifton hospital earlier this week when Congress failed to appropriate enough funds by midnight Tuesday — the beginning of the 1982 fiscal year — to pay the costs of converting the facility to local control.

However, charged that the money didn't materialize because the Reagan administration never really pushed for it on Capitol Hill. The congressman singled out Office of Management and Budget Director David Stockman for especially harsh criticism, insisting that he broke his promise to support funding for the takeover.

"In my view a commitment was made and it was violated," Molinari said. "It wasn't acted upon in good faith."

"I called the White House and advised them that from now on I was going to be openly critical of the entire administration, including the president," Molinari added. "And I told them I don't care what steps they take by retribution."

Edwin Dale, a spokesman for Stockman, said he would have "no comment" on Molinari's remarks.

Stockman promised Molinari that the administration would help implement a plan to transfer the Clifton PHS hospital to local control in a May 21 letter to the congressman. "The Staten Island hospital represents one of the most realistic prospects for such conversion," the OMB director wrote.

"The Department of Health and Human Services is committed to working with your office to facilitate that progress and to identify federal conversion resources that might be appropriate... should a qualified community group seek to operate the facility," Stockman added.

A takeover proposal was eventually submitted by St. Vincent's Medical Center. It asked for \$39 million in federal aid to absorb the federal hospital and upgrade it to state standards.

At the time of Stockman's letter, however, HHS officials warned that the success of any conversion proposal depended on whether Congress was willing to provide the necessary funding. "I can't say the department is going to write a check for the amount of money," explained Dr. John Marshall, who was as-



Dr. Florence Kavalier, director of the PHS Hospital in Clifton, announces the facility will stop accepting patients.