

DEMOCRATIC PLAN SUPPORTS VETERANS HEALTHCARE

Democrats believe America's veterans deserve access to quality, timely healthcare. Yet, today, veterans wait for appointments at VA facilities, many of which are in disrepair. Consider these facts:

- ❖ Demand has increased. In 1995, VA treated 2.6 million veterans and their families. In fiscal year 2006, the Department expects to treat more than twice that number – 5.4 million.
- ❖ New investments and upgrades to VA hospitals are costly. Some of the VA hospitals are old and in disrepair. Many hospitals were built just after World War II. Improvements recommended by the VA's CARES Commission are expected to cost billions over the next five to 10 years.

THE DEMOCRATIC PLAN FOR VETERANS HEALTHCARE

Amendments Democrats offered in the Appropriations Committee would have provided \$2.6 billion in additional investments that veterans groups say are needed for VA healthcare. For example, the Democratic amendments would have provided the following increases:

- ❖ \$735 million to prevent an increase in health care enrollment fees and deductibles for military retirees. Democrats absolutely reject increased costs for these veterans while Committee Republicans assume an increase in these fees in their bill;
- ❖ \$471 million to provide long-term care as required by law;
- ❖ \$341 million to allow enrollment of Priority 8 veterans;
- ❖ \$300 million for mental health and prosthetics;
- ❖ \$115 million to restore hospital construction projects cut by the Administration;
- ❖ \$119 million for additional VA staff to meet increased workloads;
- ❖ \$73 million to help reduce claims processing backlogs;
- ❖ \$48 million for medical and prosthetic research; and,
- ❖ \$8 million for the VA Inspector General for additional oversight and reporting on the timeliness and quality of care that veterans receive.

Some say enough is never enough for Democrats and veterans groups when it comes to VA healthcare. Democrats say enough is enough when every veteran receives access to the timely, quality healthcare he or she was promised – and nothing less.

The Republican Assault on Veterans Healthcare

Congressional Republicans continually oppose VA healthcare investments that will ensure access to timely, quality healthcare for America's veterans. In 2004 and 2005, Republicans ignored warnings that VA funding would fall far short of the need. But Republicans still haven't learned. In fact, the 2007 Republican budget would actually cut VA healthcare by \$8.6 billion from 2008 to 2011. Here's the Republican record on veterans healthcare.

2003

March – House Republicans vote for a FY 2004 budget that cuts veterans healthcare by \$14 billion over 10 years.

July – House Republicans pass an FY 2004 appropriations bill that provides \$1.8 billion less than promised in their March budget. They also block a Democratic amendment adding \$2.2 billion.

October – Republicans vote against a Democratic attempt to provide \$1.3 billion in emergency funding in the Iraq war supplemental.

2004

February – President Bush requests \$18.3 billion for VA health care in FY 2005. Veterans service organizations and the House Veterans Affairs Committee say billions more is needed. VA Secretary Principi testifies that he was told to reduce his request by \$1.2 billion.

July – On a party line vote, Republicans defeat a Democratic amendment in the Appropriations Committee to increase funding to a total of \$20.8 billion for FY 2005.

September – Republicans again reject a Democratic effort to increase funding to \$20.8 billion for FY 2005.

November – Republicans pass a final veterans funding bill for the year that provides only \$19.5 billion for FY 2005 despite warnings of a shortfall.

2005

February – President Bush requests \$20 billion for VA healthcare in FY 2006. Veterans service organizations insist that \$22.5 billion is needed.

May – House Appropriators increase the President's request, but by only \$1 billion. Committee Republicans reject a Democratic amendment that provides the full \$22.5 billion and Republicans defeat the same amendment on the House floor.

June – The Bush Administration admits that FY 2005 funding is \$1 billion short. Republicans twice block Democratic amendments to add the funding. The Senate moves to provide \$1.5 billion.

July – Republicans relent and provide the full \$20.8 billion for FY 2005 – the exact amount veterans groups and House Democrats said was needed. The Administration is also forced to admit that their request for FY 2006 is short by \$2 billion.

November – Republicans finally provide \$22.5 billion for VA healthcare – the exact amount veterans groups and Democrats said would be needed in February.

2006

February – The President requests \$25.5 billion for VA healthcare for FY 2007 – an amount that veterans groups, Democrats and even Republicans on the Veterans Affairs Committee feel is inadequate.

April – While the House Veterans Affairs Committee Republicans recommend \$26.7 billion for FY 2007, Committee Democrats indicate that \$28.2 billion is needed. Further, the Republican Budget resolution cuts VA healthcare by \$8.6 billion from 2008 to 2011.

May – On a party line vote, Appropriations Committee Republicans defeat two Democratic amendments that would provide an additional \$2.6 billion to meet critical needs in veterans healthcare.