

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2005

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
H 232 - Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We the undersigned are writing to denounce the woefully insufficient funding provided for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) under President Bush's FY 06 budget. We hope that you will oppose these egregious funding cuts and help reverse this irresponsible budget plan.

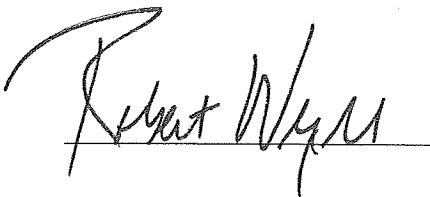
Not only is President Bush's budget proposal insufficient to meet the growing demands being placed on the VA, but the President's budget proposes a \$250 enrollment fee for so called "higher-income" veterans who have no service-connected disability, as well as doubling their co-payments for prescription drugs. Incredibly, in the same budget, President Bush proposes an 8 percent increase in federal spending, including a 4 percent increase in overall defense spending. Cutting needed veterans health benefits is an insult to the brave men and women we are calling upon to defend the country. In essence, President Bush is sending the message that America will not stand by those who have so honorably served our nation in our time of need.

Last Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs testified before the House VA Committee that the VA budget required a 14 percent funding increase in order to keep the same level of services available for America's veterans. Yet, the President's budget for FY 06 funds veterans' medical programs at \$28.2 billion, which is only \$102 million more than FY 05 or equal to less than one percent increase. Even Congressional Budget Office estimates show that, excluding the legislative proposals to increase fees on veterans by \$424 million, the President's budget for veterans program falls \$762 million below the amount needed to maintain purchasing power at the 2005 level.

Further, the President's budget gives the VA the green light to eliminate 2 percent of its direct medical care employees (more than 3,000 full-time employees) and reduce the staff at the Board of Veterans Appeals. This will result in longer waiting times for appellate decisions, as well as an increase in the backlog of appeals, which numbered 151,031 on February 5, 2005. America's veterans deserve better, and it is critical that Congress honor its obligations to provide quality health care and benefits to those who have sacrificed greatly for our nation. Democrats on the House Veterans Affairs Committee have concluded that a \$3 billion increase is needed for veterans medical care in order to meet the growing demands of services and keep pace with medical inflation.

It is our sincere hope that you will not support the President's misguided budget request but, instead, will work with us to provide a \$3 billion increase in funding for veterans medical care, so that we can honor our obligation to the nation's servicemembers, veterans and military families.

Sincerely,



Robert Wynn



Kane Evans

Tom Scott

Jim McEwan

Alfred Hyl

George Miller

Ben Cain

Art Hill

Lynn Woolsey

Alfred D. Hartwig

Manis D. Hinchey

Melvin Waters

Gene Green

Frank Pallone, Jr.

Albert R. Upton

Harold Ford

Mark Udall

Tim Ryan

Donald W. Payne

Frederic E. Cummings

Marcy Kaptur

Carl Blumen

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.

Howard L. Berman

Art Hill

Oak E. Wilder

Dennis J. Kovacic

Barbara Lee

Bob Ellen

Michael M. Mink

Lois Cappo

Stephanie P. P. Jones

Eddie Bernice Johnson

James A. Davis

Tim Van Natta

John C. Pappas

Tom Helder

Butt Lopez

John Oberstar

Major R. Owens

Dick Durbin

Rosa L. J. Lane

Joe E. Serrano

Ed Case

E. K. Butterfield

Hilda L. Solis

C. A. Wetcher Pappas

James M. Whit

Raul M. Grijalva

Bob Smith

Kenneth B. Meek

Jan McKeen

Jan Schenk

Carolyn McCarty

The following Members of Congress have co-signed this letter.

Rep. Robert Wexler
Rep. Lane Evans
Rep. David Scott
Rep. Frank Pallone
Rep. James McGovern
Rep. Al Wynn
Rep. Harold Ford, Jr.
Rep. Stephen F. Lynch
Rep. Joseph Crowley
Rep. Mark Udall
Rep. Tim Ryan
Rep. George Miller
Rep. Ben Cardin
Rep. Donald Payne
Rep. Bernie Sanders
Rep. Elijah Cummings
Rep. Lynn Woolsey
Rep. Marcy Kaptur
Rep. Alcee Hastings
Rep. Earl Blumenauer
Rep. Maurice Hinchey
Rep. Sanford Bishop
Rep. Howard Berman
Rep. Maxine Waters
Rep. Gene Green
Rep. Peter A. Defazio
Rep. Dale E. Kildee
Rep. Dennis J. Kucinich
Rep. Barbara Lee
Rep. Brad Miller
Rep. Michael M. Honda
Rep. Lois Capps
Rep. Stephanie Tubbs Jones
Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson
Rep. Chris Van Hollen
Rep. Susan Davis
Rep. John Conyers

Rep. Tim Holden
Rep. Bart Stupak
Rep. James Oberstar
Rep. Major R. Owens
Rep. Rick Boucher
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Rep. Jose Serrano
Rep. Ed Case
Rep. C.K. Butterfield
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Rep. Donna Christensen
Rep. Raul M. Grijalva
Rep. Adam Smith
Rep. Kendrick Meek
Rep. James McDermott
Rep. Jan Schakowsky
Rep. Carolyn McCarthy

Tom

Miri V. Gutierrez

Carolyn B. Meloy

Tom Lantos

Ed Pastor

Jim Moran

Thomas M. Chutkan

Julia Casson

Tom O'Dell

Loretta Sanchez

John B. Ruan

Shiana Seltzer

Henry Waxman

Jander Perri

Genell Radley

Norm Deeds

Buz Foss

Grace J. Napolitano

Ben Chandler

Buzz Bunt

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Henry Culler

Tom Allen

Anna Zhou

Jim Davis

Allyson Y. Schwartz

Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Dick Zins

Jim Davis

Chad Melanson

Jed Strickland

Jim Langevin

The following Members of Congress have cosigned this letter:

Rep. Robert Wexler
Rep. Lane Evans
Rep. Edolphus Towns
Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez
Rep. Sander Levin
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Rep. Tom Lantos
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Rep. Lincoln Davis
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Rep. Rick Larsen