



NEWS RELEASE

Congressman Ted Strickland

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STRICKLAND AND COLLEAGUES PUSH FOR MANDATORY FUNDING FOR VETERANS' HEALTH PROGRAMS

WASHINGTON – Congressman Ted Strickland (D-Lisbon) joined House Veterans Committee Members and other Democrats today to introduce legislation mandating full federal funding of veterans health care programs.

“The way we treat our veterans says a lot about our nation, and the support this legislation receives from Congress and the Administration will say a lot about how much they care for the men and women who have served in our armed forces,” said Strickland, a member of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs. “This will force Congress to provide sufficient funding for veterans’ health care programs and make certain that those who sacrificed for our nation receive the care they were promised.”

The bill comes on the heels of a Presidential task force report recommending that Congress provide full funding for veterans health programs.

Last week the President’s Task Force to Improve Health Care Delivery For Our Nation’s Veterans issued its final report. In it, the “growing mismatch between funding and demand” is repeatedly referenced. To address this problem, the report recommended:

The Federal Government should provide full funding to ensure that enrolled veterans in Priority Groups 1 through 7 (new) are provided the current comprehensive benefit in accordance with VA’s established access standards. Full funding should occur through modifications to the current budget and appropriations process, by using a mandatory funding mechanism, or by some other changes in the process that achieve the desired goal. (p. 77)

“Even the Administration admits that the United States is failing to provide adequate health care resources for the men and women who have served in our armed forces,” added Strickland. “But only time will tell whether they will accept their own recommendations and support our legislation.”

The legislation would create a guaranteed funding stream for veterans’ health care. In contrast to the current funding process, this new approach would create a predictable and rational means of funding the VA health care system based on growth in the veterans’ beneficiary population and the same inflation rate other hospital systems expect to experience.

(MORE)

Nearly all other federal government health programs are funded with mandatory spending.

In the last Congress, H.R. 5250, the "Veterans Health Care Funding Guarantee Act of 2002" had broad-based support with a total of 129 cosponsors. This year, the "Veterans Health Care Funding Guarantee Act of 2003" (S. 50) has been introduced in the Senate and is also part of S. 19, "Veterans and Military Personnel Fairness Act of 2003."

"It's long past time for this government to step up and keep its promises to our veterans," Strickland said.

The bill requires the Secretary of the Treasury to:

- (1) make available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for programs, functions, and activities of the Veterans Health Administration for FY 2005 130 percent of the amount obligated during FY 2003;
- (2) adjust the amount provided after FY 2005 based on the number of enrolled veterans and the number of others eligible for and provided care and the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index for Hospital and Related Services;

Medical construction and grants for state veterans' homes would remain subject to the appropriations process.

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