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8b/129785



**PROTECT THE SMITH-EVANS AMENDMENT TO INCREASE
FUNDING FOR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE**

Dear Representative,


On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE) and the 600,000 federal and DC government workers we represent, including 140,000 employees at the Department of Veterans (VA), I urge you to vote **NO** on passage of a rule for the VA-HUD appropriations bill that does not protect an amendment from Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Representative Lane Evans (D-ILL).

AFGE opposes the inadequate funding levels for veterans' health care reportedly contained in the FY 2004 VA-HUD appropriations bill. Our members are the VA workers who heal, treat, care for, bathe and feed veterans and maintain the VA facilities. Our members see every day that lack of adequate funding means vital equipment is not repaired or maintained, needed supplies are not purchased, staff vacancies are not filled, nursing home beds are reduced, psychiatric beds are eliminated and veterans must wait months and months for appointments to be scheduled. The inadequate funding being proposed will mean ill-defined and dubious "management efficiencies" will be implemented that will further ration and restrict veterans' access to quality care.

The House passed a budget that provides \$1.8 billion more for veterans' health care than the resources provided by the appropriations committee. The Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee plan to offer an amendment to increase veterans' health care by \$1.8 billion.

AFGE supports the bi-partisan Smith-Evans amendment and we urge you to vote **NO** to a rule that does not allow this amendment to be brought to the full House of Representatives for a vote. If you have any questions on our position, please call Linda Bennett, in AFGE's Legislative Department at 639-6456.

Sincerely,


Bobby L. Harnage, Sr.
National President