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EDITORIAL: Vets deserve thanks, not a cut in services

Wartime is the wrong time to tell veterans that the government wants to cut corners when it comes to providing them with healthcare services, Unfortunately, that is precisely what the Bush administration has done.

The White House last week announced it is seeking drastic cuts in funding for both state- and federally-run veterans' nursing homes. Among the victims would be a 95-bed nursing home planned on the grounds of Hilo Medical Center. Groundbreaking is set for August, but it's hard to see how it would be able to function under the current plan.

Additionally, the proposal would reduce the number of Veterans Administration nursing-home beds from the 13,391 required by law and put on hold \$104 million for rehabilitation and construction. Here in Hawai'i, 112,000 veterans already face wait lists for their long-term care.

VA officials say it's part of a policy to focus on veterans who became disabled while on active duty, those with catastrophic injuries, patients requiring short-term care after a hospital stay and those needing hospice or respite care.

However, it's still hard to accept this rationale when billions are being spent on the war in Iraq. And the needs of veterans remain: Within the next decade, the number of those age 75 and older is expected to double. The discussion must leave Americans wondering about its leaders' commitment to the armed forces.