

THE RECORD ON VETERANS HEALTHCARE

We should and must provide the best care for anybody who is willing to put their life in harm's way.

– President Bush, 1/17/03

Democrats believe America's veterans deserve quality 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 \$1 billion a year for at least the next five to 10 years.

Unfortunately, Congressional Republicans have continually opposed investments in the VA healthcare system that will ensure access to timely, quality healthcare for America's veterans.

2003

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

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

October – Republicans vote against a Democratic attempt to provide \$1.3 billion in emergency funding to 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 make clear that billions more would be 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 that would 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 would provide the full \$22.5 billion and Republicans defeat the same amendment on the House floor.

June – The Bush Administration admits that FY 2005 funding was \$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 was 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 would actually cut VA healthcare by \$8.6 billion over the following four years.

Some Republicans have said that enough is never enough for Democrats and veterans groups when it comes to VA healthcare. Enough is enough when veterans have timely access to the quality healthcare they were promised. They deserve nothing less.