

ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF THE HONORABLE DAVID OBEY

While the FY 2006 Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs bill is a much-needed improvement over the President's inadequate budget for veterans health care, this bill will not get the job done for the men and women who are depending on the VA to meet their health care needs.

I presented to the Majority a very simple amendment: provide veterans with an additional \$2.6 billion for VA health care and pay for it by reducing the size of the tax cut for those persons who make more than a million dollars a year. Instead of receiving a tax cut of \$140,000, people making over one million dollars this year would get \$129,000.

This is an issue of shared sacrifice. I think it is completely appropriate for the most well off in our society to take a slightly smaller tax break so we can provide health care for the men and women who have fought, sacrificed, and risked life and limb to protect the freedoms we all enjoy.

Under this amendment, veterans would get:

- \$1.5 billion more for medical services to meet increased demand;
- \$500 million to meet rising medical administrative costs;
- \$300 million to keep VA medical facilities up and running;
- \$67 million for VA medical and prosthetic research;
- \$201 million to build medical clinics and long-term care facilities; and,
- \$37 million for general administrative costs so veterans receive the prompt attention.

Why are these increases needed? The number of veterans treated at VA facilities increased from 2.7 million to 4.7 million from 1995 to 2004. Medical costs are increasing at nearly double the rate of inflation. VA facilities are old and crumbling and improvements will cost at least \$1 billion a year for the next ten years according to the VA itself. Unfortunately, the Committee rejected my amendment.

I have heard some on the majority side say, 'enough is never enough for you guys on veteran's health care.' Enough will be enough when every veteran receives the timely and high quality health care that they were promised. I did not serve in the military, but I believe we have a moral obligation when it comes to veterans health care. If in America we cannot provide health care to 45 million Americans who are without any coverage, we ought to at least be providing top-shelf, top-quality, no questions asked medical care to veterans who have risked more than anybody else in this society to keep it as free and open as it is today.

We also have a moral obligation to point out at every opportunity that the reason why veterans will not be receiving the health care they deserve is because of the misbegotten, ill-advised budget that the Republican Congress passed just a few short weeks ago. That budget, which only one Republican member of the Appropriations Committee opposed, is the reason that veterans will not receive the health care that they were promised and that they deserve.