



BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION

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July 22, 2003

The Honorable Lane Evans
U.S. House of Representatives
2211 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-1317

Dear Congressman Evans:

On behalf of the Blinded Veterans Association, the only Congressionally chartered veterans service organization exclusively dedicated to serving the needs of our Nation's blinded veterans, I urge to you increase the Fiscal Year (FY) 2004 appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Throughout the late spring and early summer, Republican members dismissed talk of an inadequate budget and touted the "sacred trust" with veterans. The House Committee on Appropriations approved nearly \$2 billion less than the original House Budget Committee agreement. The veterans health care system will remain in crisis if the proposed funding level is not increased.

The VA-HUD Appropriations bill included a proposal to increase co-payments for prescription drugs as well as to collect "user" fees from some veterans for provision of medical care. BVA applauds the decision to remove the fees, but opposes the removal of funds from VA's administrative budget to offset the projected revenues earned by the enrollment fee and increased co-payment.

The bill also includes a major increase in the amount projected to be collected from third party insurers. BVA has consistently argued that collections from third party payers should be allocated as revenue and not as part of the appropriations. While the collections system is improving, VA has never met the projections. Collections must be a supplement to, instead of a substitute for, VA appropriations.

BVA asks Congress, especially the House Republican leadership, to fulfill its promises to all veterans. Appropriate a budget that covers the needs of all veterans authorized by Congress to receive care from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Stand by your promise to provide an adequate budget to serve those men and women who served this Nation so honorably.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Miller
Executive Director

CHARTERED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES