

THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET

A Budget for Veterans by Veterans

www.independentbudget.org

July 23, 2003

TO: EVERY MEMBER OF THE US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the co-authors of *The Independent Budget*, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, we are writing to voice our strong opposition to the inadequate funding levels for veterans' health care reportedly contained in the FY 2004 VA-HUD appropriations bill.

According to the House Appropriations Committee, the FY 2004 VA-HUD appropriations bill provides for a "\$1.4 billion increase over last year and approximately the President's request." This increase is wholly inadequate to provide health care to sick and disabled veterans, and represents a flagrant disregard to promises made to veterans by this Congress to increase health care appropriations by \$1.8 billion above the President's request. Therefore, we call on you to return the VA-HUD bill to the Appropriations committee for further consideration.

The Joint Explanatory Statement on the FY 2004 budget resolution states that the "Conference Agreement provides for discretionary BA [budget authority] of \$29.96 billion for fiscal year 2004, an increase of \$3.4 billion, or 12.9 percent – nearly all of which is expected to be for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical programs." According to VA, as of June 13, there were 134,287 veterans on waiting lists nationally. Over 51,000 veterans are waiting at least six months for their appointment, and nearly 83,000 are waiting for their first clinic appointment to be scheduled. This is certainly the wrong signal to send to America's 25 million veterans. It is also a very sad message to send to the millions of American men and women serving on the front lines in Afghanistan, Iraq, in this country, and around the world, to say this Congress has little care or respect for their present and future needs.

The Independent Budget recommended a \$3.3 billion increase for medical care. As the budget process has moved forward this year, not without considerable contention over VA funding, there has been a general acknowledgement that veterans' health care must receive an increase of this magnitude in appropriated dollars in order to meet its responsibilities. Providing a wholly inadequate \$1.4 billion increase calls into question all of the press releases we have read, and news conferences we have attended touting this Congress' level of commitment to the men and women who have served this Nation.

Accordingly, please return the bill to the Appropriations Committee for reconsideration.

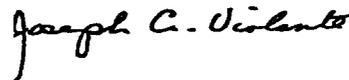
Sincerely,



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