

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, DC 20515

July 24, 2003

HELP US KEEP OUR PROMISE TO THE NATION'S VETERANS

**SUPPORT SMITH-EVANS AMENDMENT TO INCREASE  
FUNDING FOR VETERAN'S HEALTH CARE**

Dear Democratic Colleague:

We are certain, by now, that you have heard many perspectives on the adequacy of the VA medical care budget proposed for fiscal year 2004. We continue to believe if we fund VA medical care at the level requested by President Bush and approved by our Appropriations Committee, VA will be suffering under a budget that is entirely inadequate to meet veterans' needs for timely high-quality health care services.

The President's budget requests an additional \$1.4 billion for veterans' health care over the fiscal year 2003 level. Our Appropriations Committee essentially retained the recommended funding level. However, the Bush budget identified a need to fund an additional \$2.5 billion in obligations for Medical Care (p. 2-15, 2004 Congressional Submission). It claims to make up the \$1.1 billion difference by deferring equipment purchases and implementing ill-defined "management efficiencies," including savings presumed from outsourcing a large portion of its medical care workforce.

In addition, the President's budget relies upon Congress's approval of a number of unpalatable policy and legislative initiatives. The Appropriations Committee rejected a new enrollment fee and proposed increases in copayments for medications for Priority 7 and 8 veterans, but its "fix" left another \$264 million hole in funding for veteran's health care.

This Spring, the Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, Chris Smith, extracted a written commitment from Chairman Jim Nussle of the Budget Committee to defer to the Senate's recommended funding level for veterans' discretionary programs. Under duress, the House leadership agreed to this, but proceeded to allocate far less to the Subcommittee which funds veterans' medical care than was necessary to allow this increase to occur.

Veterans are outraged. You may have seen a July 18, 2003, press release from four of the major veterans' service organizations who co-author the Independent Budget -- AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. -- that proclaims, "Veterans Betrayed by Meager Health Care Funding."

This Friday, we intend to work with Chris Smith and other friends of veterans to increase the funding available for veterans' health care to the \$1.8 billion Congress resolved to add in H.Con.Res. 95. This will ensure that VA is able to continue to treat all of the veterans currently enrolled. It will also ensure VA is able to maintain a significant nursing home care mission for the aging veteran population. By funding VA at this level, Congress can help ensure that the system's medical care facilities -- many of which are more than 50 years old - - can be renovated or maintained to allow modern and efficient health care delivery for our veterans.

We hope you will join us in this fight. **Please join us on the House floor to express your concerns about the VA Budget and vote NO on passage of a rule that does not protect the Smith-Evans amendment.**

Thank you for your support of America's veterans.

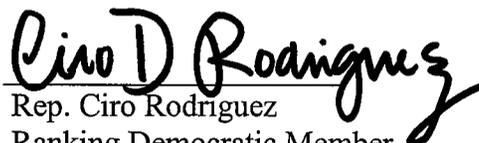
Sincerely,



Rep. Lane Evans  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Rep. Chet Edwards



Rep. Ciro Rodriguez  
Ranking Democratic Member  
Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs