

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES



July 17, 2003

The Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
H-218, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Young:

On behalf of the 2.7 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and our Ladies Auxiliary, I would like to take this opportunity to state that the FY 2004 VA-HUD appropriations bill, as it pertains to funding levels for veterans' health care, is inadequate and represents a clear betrayal of the assurances promised to America's veterans by the House Republican leadership.

In a recent press conference, the House Republican leadership assured veterans and the nation that this would be a budget that "meets the needs of America's veterans." They used veterans as political props and touted the "increase of \$3.4 billion or 12.9 percent – nearly all of which is expected to be for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical programs" contained within the FY 2004 budget resolution.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on VA-HUD, however, cut \$2 billion from the budget by passing a meager \$1.4 billion increase over last year, approximately the President's request, while at the same time accepting the Administration's proposals to increase co-payments and charge an annual enrollment fee of \$250 for category 7 and 8 veterans.

Once again, the House Republican leadership had promised veterans that these proposals would not be enacted based on the fact that 1.1 billion veterans will either be pushed out or not even bother trying to access VA health care as a result of such fees. This is enforced rationing/denial of veterans' medical care in its most blatant form.

Is this how veterans can expect to be honored by this Congress? Actions, not words, are needed to assist the over 100,000 veterans currently waiting 6 months or more for a first time health care appointment and for those category 8 veterans that have been denied care due to a lack of adequate appropriations.

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We look to you as Chairman to rectify this dire situation. We ask you to appropriate the full amounts for veterans health care contained in the FY 2004 budget resolution and in so doing living up to the promises made by Congress to America's veterans.

Sincerely,

RAY SISK
Commander-in-Chief

CC: Congressman David R. Obey
Congressman Dennis Hastert
Congressman Dick Gephardt
Congressman Tom DeLay
Congressman Chris Smith
Congressman Lane Evans