

## LARSON AND DELEGATION PRESS VA SECRETARY PRINCIPI ON CONCERNS WITH VETERANS HEALTHCARE IN REGION

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Secretary Says VA Will Ask For Additional Funding

NEWINGTON—U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) along with other members of the Connecticut and New England Congressional Delegation met this morning with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi to discuss budget problems in the New England VA Healthcare system, and the needs of local veterans. The meeting was scheduled due to the budget shortfall within the New England VA Healthcare system, reports of cuts throughout New England, the possibility of moving services in Connecticut, and the impact that would have on veterans' healthcare delivery in the region.

Secretary Principi told the delegation that he would have to approve any plan to move services at VA healthcare facilities, and as of yet he has not approved any such plan for Connecticut. He added that the VA is planning on requesting a supplemental appropriation from the Congress of about \$140 million, of which the New England region would likely only see approximately \$8 million. This request must first go through the Congressional budget process, which will likely not begin until the summer. The Secretary said that he is also seeking changes to the payment allocation formula (VERA) to ensure that regions such as New England receive adequate funding in the future.

Larson stated: "I am pleased that the VA recognizes that there is a need for additional funding for New England VA healthcare, and the supplemental appropriations request is a start. However, the roughly \$8 million that would be spread throughout all of New England is not enough to solve our ongoing problems, which include expectations of a roughly \$40 million shortfall this year. Along with other members of the delegation, I explained that the VA system is shortchanging veterans in Connecticut and all of New England because of the flaws in the allocation formula.

"With regard to our situation in the state, I will continue to strongly urge the VA to explore cost savings options other than moving specialty care services from Newington to West Haven. Connecticut was the first state in the region to consolidate and integrate its services to meet the goals of the current payment allocation formula, and since that time we have continued to face cuts to offset deficiencies that exist elsewhere in the system.

"Connecticut veterans services have been cut to the bone, and there is simply nothing left to cut. When Americans entered our armed forces, it was with the understanding that their healthcare would be more than adequately addressed through the VA system once they left the service, and anything short of keeping that promise is unacceptable," said Larson.

Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro (CT-03) stated: "As the Connecticut delegation's representative on the House Appropriations Committee, I will work with my colleagues to introduce an amendment to the Veterans' Administration supplemental funding request that will address any budgetary shortfall. It is the right and just thing to do. Veterans answered the call and put their lives and their futures on the line to serve our country -- now it is our turn to stand by them in their time of need."

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