

## LARSON PLEASED WITH CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT PROVIDED TO VETERANS IN DEFENSE BILL

### Healthcare for Veteran

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Healthcare for Veterans and Connecticut Defense projects were funded by House WASHINGTON - According to U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01), "the First Congressional District's 47,862 veterans gained a major healthcare victory today" with the passage of the Department of Defense Authorization bill (H.R. 4205) in the House of Representatives.

The Congressman, who supported the bill, was extremely pleased that the House accepted an amendment to expand the current TRICARE Senior Prime demonstration program nationwide and make the program a permanent part of the military healthcare system. The TRICARE Senior Prime demonstration is also commonly referred to as "Medicare subvention." The bill also included a provision that would extend prescription drug coverage to all military retirees over the age of 65.

Larson, a member of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel, worked closely with his Democratic colleagues on the Subcommittee to push the Medicare subvention amendment forward during floor debate yesterday evening, despite opposition mounted by the Subcommittee's Chairman. Under the amendment approved by the House, the Department of Defense will be able to enroll its Medicare-eligible retirees into the Department's TRICARE Prime program and receive Medicare reimbursement. Medicare eligible military retirees will have comprehensive health care services at a lower cost to Medicare, and enrollees will have better access to care in military treatment facilities. The amendment allows all military health facilities to be treated as Medicare+Choice plans such as HMOs, and provides a fuller range of comprehensive health care benefits to enrolled retirees. A second component, Medicare Partners, permits military retirees enrolled in Medicare+Choice plans to receive Medicare services through military health care facilities, allowing these plans to contract with DOD facilities to provide specialty and inpatient care to enrolled retirees. During last month's District Work Period, Larson toured the Veterans Administration Connecticut Healthcare System's Newington facility and met with staff and patients. "I know how important medical care is to so many retired veterans. That's why I feel fortunate to be able to help the veterans in my district and across the country have a stronger voice in Congress. These healthcare-related initiatives serve as a reminder to all in this nation that our military retirees truly represent our "greatest generation," as Tom Brokaw's book illustrates," said Larson.

He continued, "We have to live up to the commitment we made to these veterans to provide them with a lifetime of healthcare coverage. I can remember my father asking my mother many times "Who won the war, Pauline?" I'm sure many veterans have asked that same question today as they find themselves having to fight for care that is rightfully theirs. I believe that we can and should do more for our veterans. This is not a time to pull back, this is a time to move forward. With Memorial Day around the corner we have an opportunity to act on their behalf."

The Veterans Administration Connecticut Healthcare System reports that there are an estimated 313,000 veterans in the state.

Currently, more than half of the Medicare-eligible military retiree population cannot participate in the DOD pharmacy benefit program because of where they live. Section 721 of H.R. 4205 extends coverage to these 800,000 retirees under the new Tricare Senior Pharmacy Program. The program will be administered by the Defense Department, and the prices for the drugs will be negotiated by the Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia (DSCP), a government agency. The DSCP will negotiate price discounts for military retirees that are as good as or better than prices obtained by other federal agencies.

Specifically, H.R. 4205 would allow retirees to access mail-order prescription drugs, and enable them to purchase prescription drugs at pharmacies using both the TRICARE network and out-of-network pharmacies.

The Tricare Senior Pharmacy Program is a priority for military retiree groups. Earlier this week (May 16), President Clinton announced his support for the extended coverage to military retirees, and urged Congress to show the same bipartisan support for extending prescription drug coverage to all Medicare beneficiaries.

Larson, who is a member of the Armed Services Committee, reported that Connecticut defense industry projects also were strongly supported in the final House vote on the Defense Department's Fiscal Year 2001 budget bill (H.R. 4205). One project in particular, the F-22 jet fighter project, which includes two Pratt & Whitney built engines per plane, received full funding of the President's proposal of \$3.9 billion for the procurement of 10 aircraft next year, and 16 aircraft in 2002.

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