

## LARSON: VETERAN SPENDING BILL FALLS SHORT

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Congressman John B. Larson today called for greater funding for the VA health care system as Congress took up the Military Quality of Life Appropriations Bill (H.R. 2528). The bill provides \$121.8 billion for veterans' health care and military construction in 2006.

This bill, unfortunately, falls short by \$2.6 billion in meeting the needs of the VA, Larson said. As our young men and women return home from Iraq and Afghanistan, they will come home to a health care system that can hardly take care of current veterans - let alone new ones.

Today, more than 50,000 veterans are waiting in line for at least six months for veterans' health care -- and that problem will only worsen with the growing numbers of soldiers returning from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. As of May 2005, the VA had treated only about 85,000 of the 360,675 veterans from these deployments. In 2006, the Department expects to treat 5.2 million veterans - double the number in 1995. The overall cost increase for medical care in 2003 was close to double the inflation rate.

During consideration of the bill, Representative David Obey (D-WI) attempted to offer an amendment to increase funding for medical care by \$2.6 billion. However, the Majority prevented the amendment reaching the floor.

The majority is nothing if not consistent, and has once again blocked attempts to fully fund the VA, Larson said. It is long past time that Congress match rhetoric with real action to ensure veterans - current and new - receive the level of service they were promised.

Larson has consistently fought to ensure that veterans get the health care system they were promised in return for their service to our nation. He is a cosponsor of the Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act of 2005 (H.R. 515), which would require that the VA be funded based on the number of enrolled veterans - ensuring that veterans get a fully funded health care system.

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