

LARSON REINTRODUCES VETERANS HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) today reintroduced the 21st Century Veterans Equitable Treatment Act (VET-21). The legislation represents a longstanding commitment from Larson to improve access to health care for America's veterans. During a February 2002 forum in Newington, Larson listened to the concerns of local veterans about the imbalance of health care funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for New England. Based on those concerns, Larson originally introduced VET-21 in October 2002.

Larson stated, "With our nation at war, it is more important than ever that our veterans receive the level of care they deserve for their service to this country. When the VA was created, we made a promise to provide them with world class health care. This legislation will ensure that no matter where a veteran is, he or she will not go without treatment."

"This bill will do nothing to take away from the VA health care system. In fact, I was proud to have recently voted for historic increases in veterans' health and benefit programs, totaling nearly \$12 billion. This bill will merely enhance the level of health care we offer to veterans."

U.S. Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) joined Larson in introducing the bill. "Our veterans need the best care this country has to offer and they shouldn't have to wait for it. This bill is so critical to our veterans because while we clean up the mess created by years of insufficient funding in veterans healthcare programs, their immediate healthcare needs have to be met. And with thousands of brave men and women returning from conflicts abroad with wounds ranging from lost limbs to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, we have to find a way to make the VA system work. That is why I am proud to sponsor this bill with my colleague John Larson," said Murphy.

VET-21 would require the Secretary of VA to set limits for the amount of time that a veteran has to wait for appointments using the VA's established performance goals. If the VA cannot meet these standards, the bill would allow a veteran to seek service or treatment at a non-VA medical facility for which the veteran would have otherwise qualified within the VA system. It also recommends Smart Card technology to expedite reimbursements for services and reduce complicated paperwork.

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