

Veterans/Military Issues

VA Health Care Funding

In 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expects to treat 5.8 million veterans – more than double the number in 1995. Instead of providing adequate funding, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that the President's budget for fiscal year 2008 would cut veterans' health care by \$3.4 billion over five years (below the level needed to keep up with inflation). This lack of funding has resulted in health care rationing and an entire group of veterans denied access to the system. On May 17, 2007, I voted in favor of a budget resolution (S.Con.Res.21) that invests \$32 billion over five years above the President's budget. On May 24, 2007, I also voted in favor of the House passed emergency FY07 Supplemental Appropriations bill (H.R. 2206) which included an additional \$1.8 billion for veterans' healthcare and to assist with mental health, benefit claims, and the backlog maintaining VA facilities. It also included an additional \$2 billion for military health care at Walter Reed and other hospitals, including Traumatic Stress Disorder/Counseling and the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) care and research. Finally, On June 15, 2007, I voted in favor of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (VA) Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2008 (H.R. 2642) that would provide \$43.2 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which is \$6.7 billion above 2007 and \$3.8 billion over the President's request for veterans' medical care, claims processing personnel, and facility improvements. This includes \$28.9 billion in funding to improve access to medical services for all veterans, which is \$1.7 billion above the President's request. This legislation is the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the VA and for the first time in 21 years that the House has exceeded the request of the veterans' Independent Budget.

Because funding for the VA health system is considered discretionary – rather than mandatory - spending, the annual VA budget is left open to cuts and under-funding that strain services, reduces benefits, and increase waiting times for access to appointments. I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act (H.R. 2514), which would fund the VA through mandatory, rather than discretionary, funding similar to the way Social Security and other entitlements are funded. Honoring our promises to our veterans means providing them access to high quality medical care. You can be assured that I will continue to fight to ensure that we fulfill our moral obligation to the brave men and women who have served our nation.

Press Releases & Floor Statements

7/6/07 - Reps. Murphy, Larson Highlight
Historic Commitment to Veterans Funding

6/15/07 - Larson Honors Commitment to Veterans, Votes for Historical Funding for Vets Programs

3/28/07 - Larson Statement on Passage of Wounded Warrior Assistance Act

Additional Information

- Veterans' Health Care Issues (Library of Congress)
Veterans' Benefits: Issues in the 110th Congress (Library of Congress)

VET-21

I recently re-introduced the 21st Century Veterans Equitable Treatment Act (H.R. 3455), which would require the Secretary of the VA to set limits for the amount of time that a veteran has to wait for appointments using the VA's established performance goals. Under this bill, if the VA cannot meet these standards, it 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 would also recommend "Smart Card" technology to expedite reimbursements for services and reduce complicated paperwork. The bill has been referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Press Release

8/4/07 - Larson Reintroduces Veterans Health Care Legislation

Disabled Veterans Tax

Due to a 100 year old law banning "concurrent receipt" of both benefits, a veteran with both 20 years of military service and a service-related disability, has their benefit reduced on a dollar-for-dollar basis by the amount he or she receives in disability compensation. This reduction in the veteran's retirement benefits is commonly known as the "Disabled Veterans Tax," which essentially taxes the disability compensation eligible veterans receives at a 100 percent rate.

According to the Department of Defense (DoD), over half a million veterans lose an estimated \$3 billion in benefits each year. I am a cosponsor of the Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act (H.R. 333), which would permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability to receive both military retired pay by reason of their years of military service and disability compensation from the VA for their disability. Additionally, I voted in favor of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (H.R. 1585) that would take another step toward ending this unfair tax by expanding the special compensation for combat-related disabled retirees who have served at least 15 years and have a 60 percent disability rating.

Additional Information

- The Disabled Veterans Tax Impacts Hundreds of Veterans in CT's First Congressional District (Committee on Government Reform - Democratic Staff)
Military Retirement, Concurrent Receipt, and Related Major Legislative Issues (Library of Congress)

Veterans Mental Health

It is estimated that one-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan face mental health challenges. In addition, almost one thousand veterans receiving VA care commit suicide each year and one out of five suicides in the United States is a veteran. I voted in favor of the House passed FY2008 Department of Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1585), which launches a Military Mental Health Initiative to coordinate all DOD mental health research and a Traumatic Brain Injury Initiative to provide the opportunity for emerging technologies and treatments to compete for funding. On June 15, 2007, I also supported the Military Construction-VA appropriations

bill (H.R. 2642), which provides \$600 million for mental health and PTSD, including funding that would ensure the five Level I Polytrauma Centers and the three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and PTSD are fully operational in 2008. These Centers treat the signature injuries for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Almost one thousand veterans receiving VA care commit suicide each year and one out of five suicides in the United States is a veteran. I am a cosponsor and voted in favor of the Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (H.R. 327), which would establish a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans, with 24-hour mental health care for veterans and a mental health outreach and education program for veterans.

Military Survivor Benefits

As you know, surviving military spouses participating in the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) were promised 55 percent of the deceased retired military pay for life. However, under current law, when surviving spouses reach age 62, the benefit is significantly reduced to 35 percent of the retired pay. This unfairly penalizes more than 60,000 survivors and that is why I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1927, which would allow widows to receive all benefits to which they are entitled without one benefit offsetting another. On May 17, 2007, I voted in favor of the FY2008 Department of Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 1585) that includes a special survivor indemnity allowance to begin addressing this unfair tax.

Additional Information

Military Death Benefits:
[Status and Proposals \(Library of Congress\)](#)

Priority
8 Veterans

In 2003, the Bush

Administration prevented Priority 8 veterans (those at the lowest level without service related injuries) from enrolling in VA healthcare. The President's proposed fiscal year 2008 budget continues this restrictive policy, which has denied over 242,000 veterans access to the VA services they earned for their service to our nation. As a result, I am a cosponsor of the Honor our Commitment to Veterans Act (H.R. 463), which would lift the ban on priority 8 veterans.

Veterans
Services

My office stands ready to assist district veterans with questions and problems related to federal agencies and services. If you should need any assistance on matters involving veterans' affairs, please contact my Hartford office at (860) 278-8888.

Answers

to common question about VA services

- Guide

to Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents (Department of Veterans Affairs)

Veterans
History Project

The Veterans History

Project (VHP) was created in to collect and preserve the personal histories of veterans and those who served in support of them. Learn more about what my office is doing to organize this effort in the First Congressional District here.

Press Releases

12/5/03 - Larson, Veterans, Students
Kickoff Veterans History Project in Connecticut

Helpful
Links

United
States Department of Veterans Affairs
VA
Services for members returning from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring
Freedom

- State
of Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs
House Committee
on Veterans Affairs – Majority
House
Committee on Veterans Affairs – Minority

Congressman Larson and
a bipartisan Congressional Delegation led by House
Speaker Nancy Pelosi commemorated Memorial Day 2007 with
U.S. Marines and retired veterans at the Allied Museum
in Berlin, Germany.