

SUPPORTING THE HEALTHCARE NEEDS OF OUR TROOPS AND VETERANS

As a nation, particularly one at war, we must ensure the best care for those who have served in our armed forces. That is why the New Direction Congress has made funding Veterans healthcare a top priority, expanding programs and funding for our troops more than any other Congress in history. The strains of combat have led to an increase in traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. We need to make sure that funding and research is available to find better treatments and increase access to services for these life-altering conditions.

On August 13, 2007, I reintroduced the 21st Century Veterans Equitable Treatment Act, H.R. 3455. After serving our country with honor and distinction our soldiers deserve to have quick access to the medical care they need. They should not be forced to wait on months-long lines to see doctors. This bill would ensure that veterans who have been referred to a specialist receive an appointment at a VA hospital in a reasonable time period. If the VA hospital can not accommodate them, they would be guaranteed reimbursement for an appointment with a private specialist.

The following are some of the other bills I cosponsored or voted for in the 110th Congress related to healthcare for our troops and veterans:

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H.R. 4986: The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (became law on January 28, 2008): This included the Wounded Warrior Act (H.R. 1518), which was introduced in response to the revelations about the unacceptable conditions our wounded soldiers and veterans at Walter Reed Hospital were living in. It required increased standards of care and better coordination of care for recovering troops. In addition, the bill ensured that the cost of veterans' health care benefits did not increase for beneficiaries. And, it included enough funding to make sure that there would be no cuts to military medical personnel.

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H.R. 2764: The Omnibus Appropriations Bill of 2008 included increased funding for veterans healthcare. This increase in funding was the largest increase for Veterans healthcare in the agency's 77-year history. The bill improved services for veterans by helping to decrease the backlog for obtaining disability and other benefits, increased access to services for those with post-traumatic stress disorder, and provided needed funds for maintaining and improving VA facilities.

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S. 2162: Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008 (became law on October 10, 2008) - This comprehensive legislation increased the availability of substance abuse treatment for veterans at VA facilities, required the Department of Veterans Affairs to reimburse veterans who receive emergency care in a non-VA facility, and set up a pilot program to allow veterans living in rural areas to receive some services at a non-VA facilities. In addition, the bill authorized \$2.1 billion for FY 2009 to construct VA medical facilities.

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H.R. 327: Joshua Omvig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act (became law November 5, 2007): This bill recognizes the devastating effects of Post-traumatic stress disorder; a disease that has afflicted many of our troops returning home from combat. It requires that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs develop a comprehensive plan to reduce the number of

suicides among veterans through increased training for Veterans Affairs staff, more comprehensive counseling services, and increased support for veterans and families coping with mental health problems.

Statements and Press Releases:

LARSON REINTRODUCES VETERANS HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION

LARSON HONORS COMMITMENT TO VETERANS, VOTES FOR HISTORICAL FUNDING FOR VETS PROGRAMS

Larson Statement on Passage of Wounded Warrior Assistance Act