



# OFFICE OF SPEAKER NANCY PELOSI FACT SHEET

## **Military Construction & Veterans Affairs Appropriations: HISTORIC COMMITMENT TO OUR VETERANS**

### **Key Points:**

- **The New Direction Congress is honoring America's servicemen and women, their families, and our veterans and strengthening our military with both our words and deeds.**
- **This Military Construction/VA spending bill provides the largest single increase in the 77 year history of the Veterans Administration, while boosting military construction so that our servicemen and women having more effective training facilities, and better housing, health care and day care facilities.**
- **This bipartisan measure is strongly endorsed and hailed as a 'major victory' and "impressive commitment" by all of the major veterans' organizations.**
- **The Congress is committed to taking our country in a new direction -- working in a bipartisan way to ensure that the budget honors the service of our veterans and builds a future worthy of their sacrifice.**
- **With passage of this bill, the 110th Congress will have voted for historic increases in veterans' health care and benefits programs, totaling nearly \$12 billion (including the joint resolution and the supplemental), to meet the needs of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and make up for the Bush Administration's past shortcomings in its treatment of veterans.**

This week, the House will take up H.R. 2642, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations for FY 2008. This bill will provide veterans with the health care and benefits we promised them, resulting in the hiring of more qualified doctors and nurses to improve medical services to our veterans and to reduce waiting times for doctor appointments, and provide more to help veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mental health care issues and lost limbs so that they can rebuild their lives.

### **Historic Increases in VA Spending for FY 2008**

- **Increases the VA budget by \$6.7 billion above the FY07 level, the largest single increase in the 77 year history of the Veterans Administration and \$3.8 billion above the President's request.**
- **For the first time, the budget for VA medical care exceeds the budget of the veterans' service organizations by \$294 million. This will ensure quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, which the VA will treat in FY 2008.**

- Significantly reduces the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more than 1,100 new claims processors.
- Provides much needed maintenance of VA health care facilities (funding is \$500 million above the President's request) to prevent a Walter Reed-type scandal from occurring. A recent VA report outlined 1,000 specific problems at VA health facilities around the country, with a backlog of \$5 billion in maintenance.
- Makes five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fully operational this year to care for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, including those with TBI. An estimated one-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are facing mental health challenges, and up to 300,000 troops are expected to return from Iraq suffering from TBI. [GAO, 11/06; PBS, 2/18/07]
- To ensure a seamless transition from the Defense Department to the VA, particularly for veterans suffering from TBI or PTSD, the bill permits the Department of Veterans Affairs to transfer up to \$15 billion for a joint program to improve access to care.
- Develops and operates a toll-free telephone and web-based hotline for veterans to report on deficiencies in VA medical facilities and care.

### **Strengthens Our Military**

- Provides better barracks, housing and training facilities when troops return from combat through an unprecedented \$21.4 billion investment in military construction, family housing, and BRAC (\$207 million more than the President's request).
- Provides funds to grow our military forces and begins the process of adding 65,000 Army, 27,000 Marine, and 9,000 National Guard and Reserve troops.
- Fully funds the 2005 base realignment and closure process (BRAC) at \$8.2 billion. Supports the relocation of 70,000 troops from bases in Korea and Europe.

### **Enhances Accountability to Stop Wasteful Spending**

- Increases funding for the Inspector General for VA to improve services for veterans and their families and to prevent and deter potential waste, fraud and inefficiencies.

## Veterans Groups Hail Bill as “Major Victory” and an “Impressive Commitment” to our Veterans

- All of the major veterans groups strongly endorse the measure – including Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Disabled Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Association of the United States Army, National Association for Uniformed Services, and AMVets.
- **American Legion called it:** “an impressive commitment to this nation’s service members, veterans, and their families. This measure... reflects funding levels recommended by The American Legion and the vast majority of the veterans’ community.” [Letter to Speaker Pelosi, June 7, 2007]
- **Independent Budget:** “This represents a significant, much-needed investment in health care and the benefits delivery system for our nation’s sick and disabled veterans,” according to AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars. [Press release, May 24, 2007]
- **Military Officers Association of America:** “The extraordinary level of funding gives the VA vital resources to adequately address the health care needs of the men and women who have served and sacrificed in defense of our nation. It also will allow the VA to expand its efforts to effectively tackle the enormous and rapidly growing backlog.” [Letter to Chairman Obey, June 6, 2007]
- **AmVets:** “Overall, AMVETS believes these funding levels will ensure VA will be able to serve America’s veterans and their families with dignity and compassion, and that the department will successfully continue to be their principal advocate in ensuring they receive medical care, benefits, social support, and other crucial services. Equally important, this level of funding will ensure that returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan will continue to receive priority health care and other VA services.” [Letter to Chairman Chet Edwards, June 11, 2007]
- **The National Association for Uniformed Services:** “Our heroes deserve the priority attention you have given in providing the resources necessary to deliver quality healthcare and entitlement programs to our veterans. The fiscal year 2008 appropriations will have a positive impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who have dedicated their lives to serving our country, and I want you to know we appreciate your leadership.” [From Rick Jones, Legislative Director of NAUS, June 6, 2007]
- **Disabled American Veterans called it:** “keeping faith with America’s veterans” and said “your conviction to fully fund VA health care has been borne out in the generous increase you passed for the Veteran Health Administration.” [Letter from Bradley Barton, DAV National Commander, May 23, 2007]

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June 12, 2007