

# The Washington Post

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## Some Soldiers Return From War Only to Battle the System at Walter Reed

### THE OTHER WALTER REED

## Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration At Army's Top Medical Facility

By Dana Peres and Anne Hill, Washington Post Staff Writers

Behind the door of Army Spic, Jeremy Duncan's room, part of the wall is torn and hangs in the air, weighted down with black mold. When the wounded combat engineer stands in his shower and looks up, he can see the mold on the floor above through a rotted hole. The entire building, constructed between the world wars, often smells like green rot. Signs of neglect are everywhere: mouse droppings, hole-up cockroaches, stained carpets, cheap mattresses.

This is the world of Building 18, not the kind of place where Duncan expected to recover when he was evacuated to Walter Reed Army Medical Center from Iraq last February with a broken neck and a shredded left ear, nearly dead from blood loss. But the old lodge, just outside the gates of the hospital and five miles up the road from the White House, has housed hundreds of maimed soldiers recuperating from injuries suffered in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The common perception of Walter Reed is of a surgical hospital that shines as the crown jewel of military medicine. But 50 years of sustained neglect have transformed the venerable 125-acre installation into something else entirely — a holding ground for physically and psychologically damaged veterans. At least 700 of them — the majority soldiers, with some Marines — have been released from hospital beds but still need treatment or are awaiting bureaucratic decisions before being discharged or returned to active duty.

They suffer from brain injuries, severed arms and legs, organ and back damage, and various degrees of post-traumatic stress. Their legions have grown so exponentially — they outnumber hospital patients at Walter Reed 17 to 1 — that they take up every available bed on post and spill into dozens of nearby hotels and apartments leased by the Army. The average stay is 10 months, but some have been stuck there for as long as two years.

Not all of the quarters are as bleak as Duncan's, but the despair of Building 18 symbolizes a larger problem in Walter Reed's treatment of the wounded, according to doctors of soldiers, family members, veterans aid groups, and current and former Walter Reed staff members interviewed by two Washington



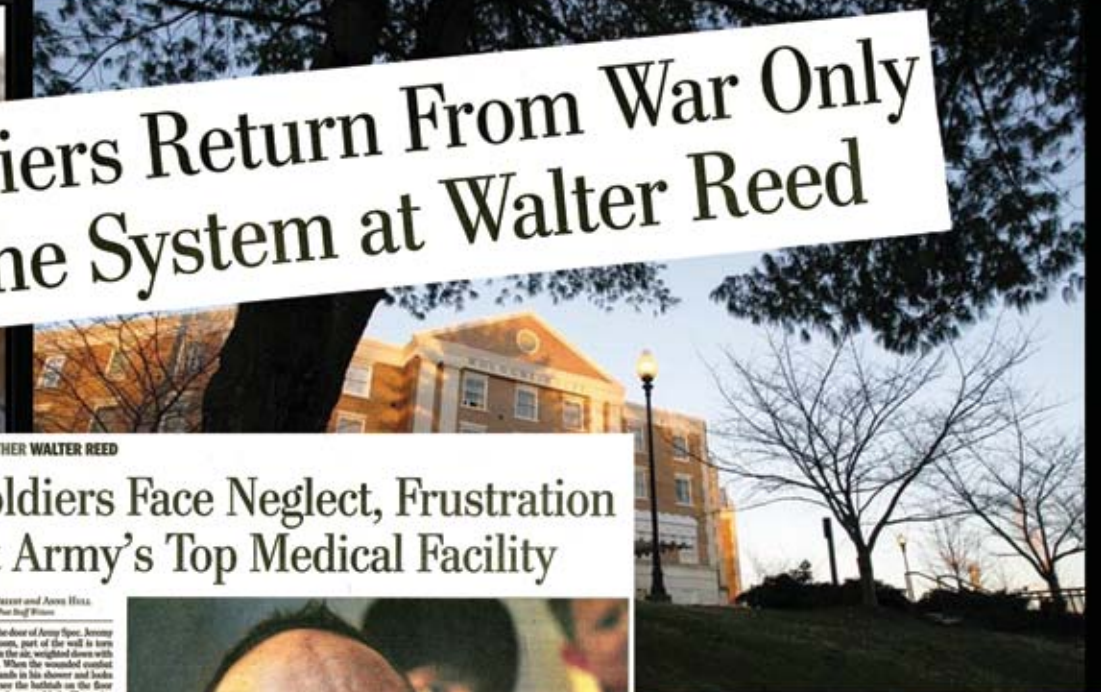
Staff Sgt. John David Shannon has spent more than two years as a patient at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The former soldier's shell was shattered in a gun battle in Iraq, and he has post-traumatic stress disorder. With his 101st Air Assault Division, he was in Iraq in 2003.



### The Outpatient World

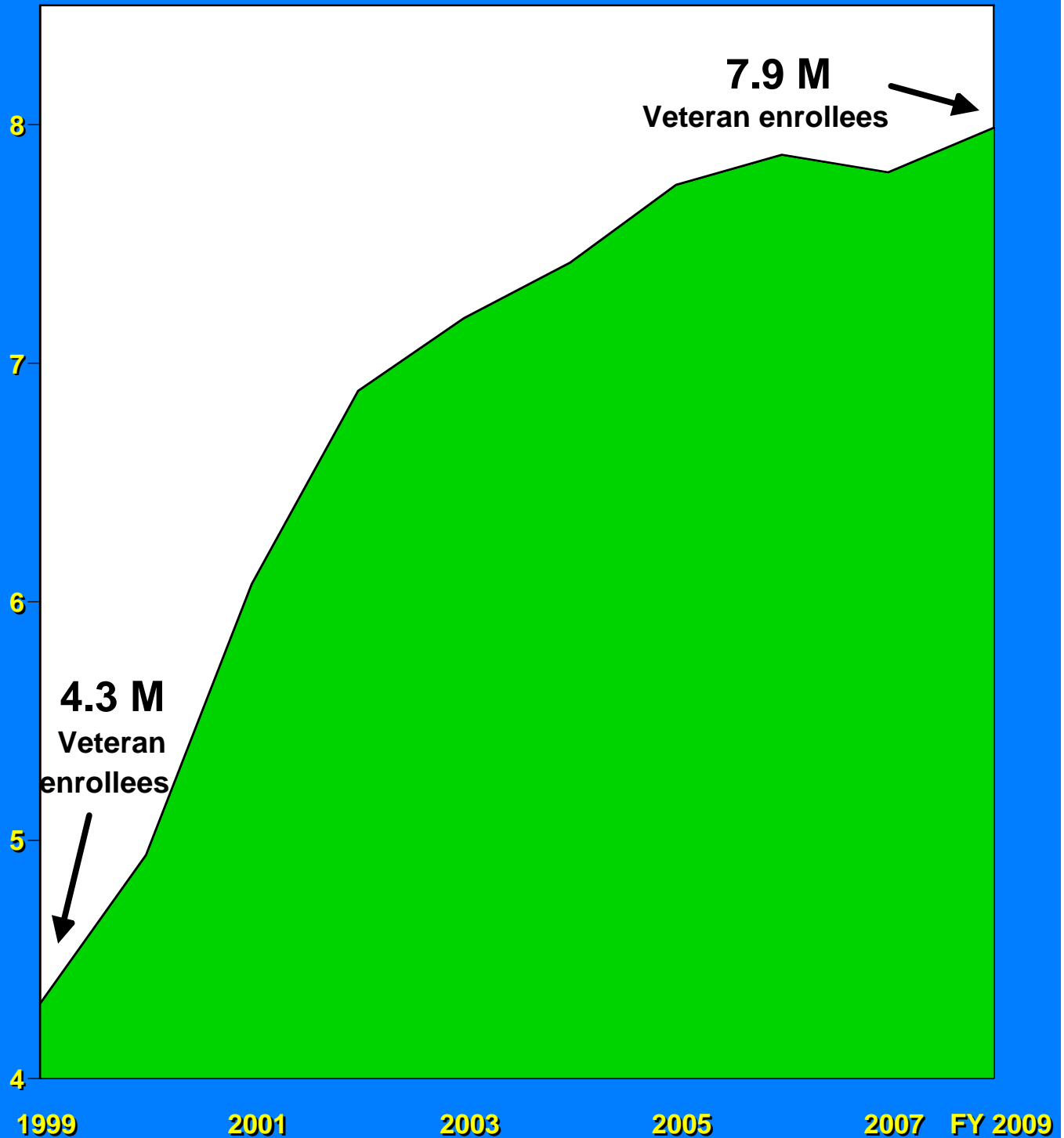
Building 18, left, is just outside the gates of Walter Reed on Georgia Avenue. It is one of five buildings that house more than 700 recuperating soldiers, some of whom report:

- Wounded can wait for weeks with no help from staff to arrange treatment
- Recuperating soldiers are asked to manage and guard other soldiers
- Case workers are understaffed, and there are not enough of them
- Lost paperwork and bureaucratic delays are common



# Increase in Number of Veteran Enrollees

(Millions of veterans. FY 1999 - 2007)



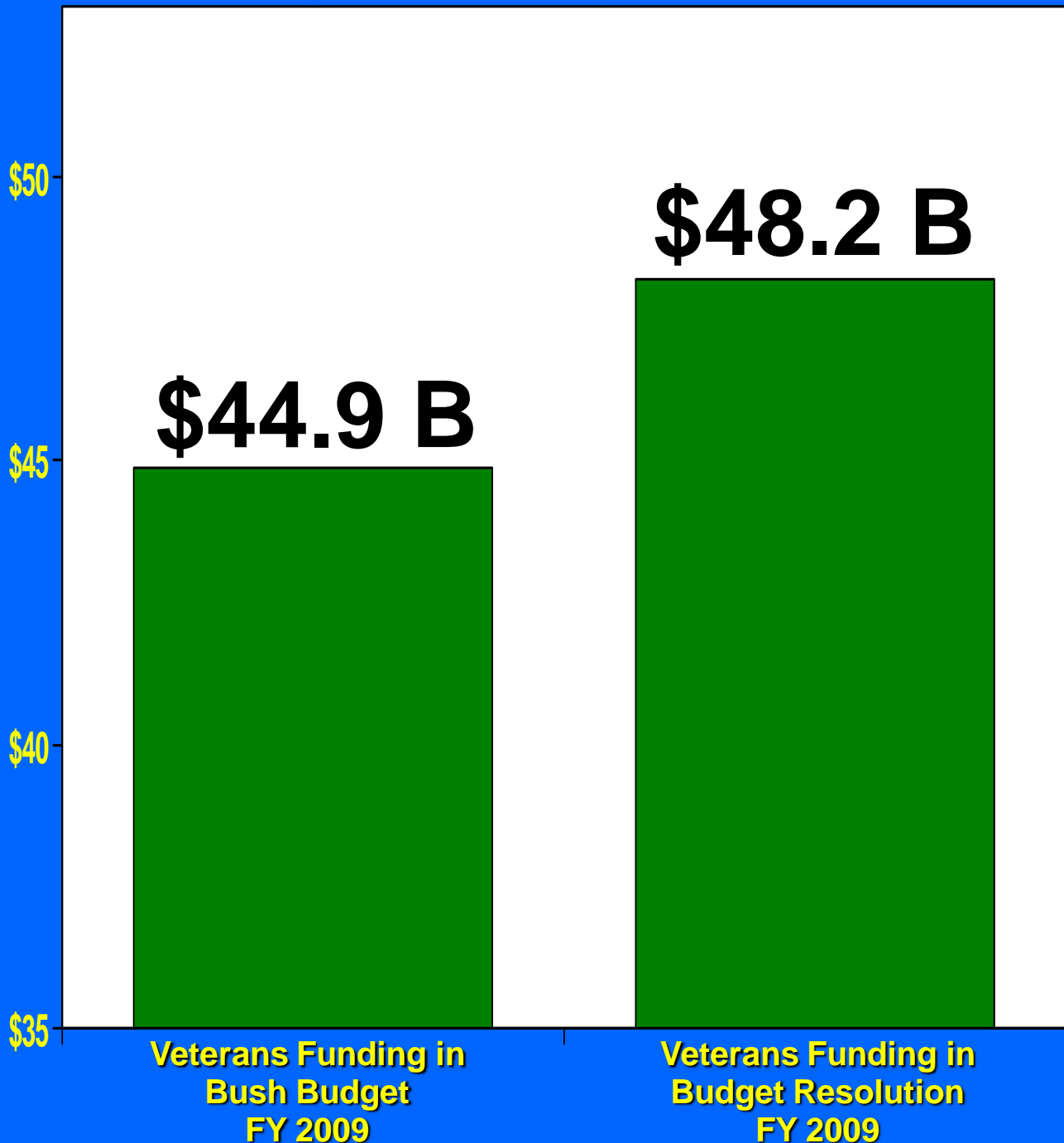
Source: CRS analysis of VA Budget Justifications data, December 2006

# 2008 Accomplishments for Veterans

- 2008 Budget Resolution provided \$43.1 billion for veterans, which was the largest increase in VA history, and provided 98% of Independent Budget
- 2008 Appropriations followed Budget Resolution by providing \$43.3 billion for Veterans
- Blocked President's proposed co-pay and fee increases for veterans

# Budget Resolution Provides \$3.3 Billion More Than Bush Budget for Veterans

(Veterans funding in 2009, \$ in billions)



Source: CBO, SBC

# **Issues of Concern for North Dakota Veterans**

- **Limited availability of  
specialized care**
- **Long distances to reach  
care centers**



# Recent Accomplishments for North Dakota Veterans

- **\$12 million to improve Fargo VA Medical Center**
- **\$1.6 million grant to fund transitional housing for homeless veterans**
- **Secured five new Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) – Williston, Dickinson, Jamestown, Devils Lake, and Grand Forks AFB**
- **Secured 65% federal cost share for construction of new state veterans home in Lisbon**