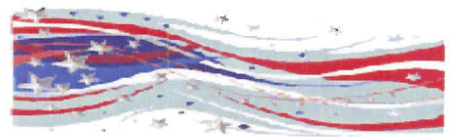




# House Veterans' Affairs Committee

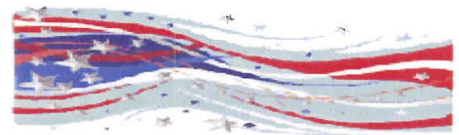
## Priorities for the 110th Congress



PRIORITY	STATUS
<p><b>Adequate &amp; Timely Funding for Veterans</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The House of Representatives approved the funding bill for the VA on August 1, 2008, which increases veterans' funding for 2009 by \$4.6 billion—an 11% increase! This landmark appropriation provides \$2.9 billion more than the President's request. This bill will next be considered in the Senate.</li> <li>➤ House Democrats continue to build on the success of historical funding increases for the current fiscal year, when the Congress voted last year to increase VA funding by 30%, successfully adding \$12 billion to the baseline of the VA budget.</li> </ul> <p><b>Talking Points:</b>  <i>The cost of providing for America's heroes must be included in the cost of war. Just as we fund the war, so to must we fund the warrior. Congress understands this fact, and is working hard to ensure that service members receive the very best care, honor and respect that a loving nation can bestow.</i></p>	
<p><b>G.I. Bill for the 21st Century</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A new law has been enacted to expand the G.I. Bill and restore education benefits for veterans to World War II levels.</li> <li>➤ This new G.I. Bill will provide the full cost of tuition at four-year colleges to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, recognizes the sacrifice of our 1.8 million Reserve and National Guard troops by better aligning their educational benefits with their length of service, and also allows unused education benefits to be transferred to spouses and children.</li> </ul> <p><b>Talking Points:</b>  <i>Returning veterans have shown their commitment to our country by their service and it is important to provide to our most dedicated citizens an opportunity to receive the education and training they missed while serving in the military. Providing veterans with the means to better themselves through educational opportunities has been a goal of this nation since 1944, when the first G.I. Bill of Rights laid a foundation for veterans to have the support necessary to readjust to civilian life.</i></p> <p><i>The G.I. Bill for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will help make our veterans part of the economic recovery, much like the veterans of World War II. Now, in 2008, this country has come together to fully invest in the future of our heroes and support those who have borne the heaviest burdens of war.</i></p>	

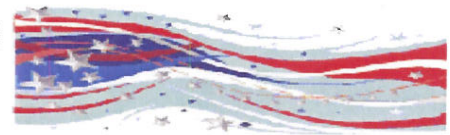
# House Veterans' Affairs Committee

## Priorities for the 110th Congress



PRIORITY	STATUS
<p><b>Addressing the Disability Claims Backlog</b></p> <p>➤ The House of Representatives passed the Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act of 2008 - a landmark bill directing the VA Secretary to modernize the disability benefits claims processing system to ensure the accurate and timely delivery of compensation to veterans and their families and survivors.</p> <p><b>Talking Points:</b>  <i>H.R. 5892 would comprehensively modernize the VBA claims processing system and arm it with the up-to-date tools and paradigms it needs to process claims using integrated information technology and platforms, while improving accountability, timeliness, and quality of adjudicated claims. This bill will help VA update its claim processing system so that the VBA will become a 21<sup>st</sup> Century, world-class entity that reflects the selfless sacrifices of those it serves – our veterans, their families, and survivors.</i></p> <p><i>Our men and women should not get first-class weapons to fight only to come home and receive third-class benefits. Too many veterans think that VA stands for Veterans Adversary instead of Veterans Advocate. The changes mandated in this bill will ensure that the benefits provided to our veterans are first-rate and uncompromised.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>
<p><b>Providing Oversight of the VA</b></p> <p>The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs conducted an oversight hearing upon learning that VA failed to adequately protect veterans during an on-going research study focused on smoking cessation techniques for veterans with PTSD. When Chantix, an anti-smoking drug, was linked to suicidal thoughts and aggressive and erratic behavior, the VA failed to immediately contact veterans participating in the study to discuss the increased risk of taking Chantix.</p> <p><b>Talking Points:</b>  <i>I am very concerned about the process VA has in place for protecting veterans participating in research studies. In no way do I want to diminish the value or necessity of research conducted at the VA. It is, however, the responsibility of this Committee to ensure that the safety of veterans is never overshadowed by the research mission at the VA.</i></p> <p><i>Congress has mandated that medical research at the VA be monitored and reviewed, but this process has not been executed properly in this case. Secretary Peake is not being well served by the government workers who oversee these research programs. These VA employees are entrusted with the care of our veterans and our veterans deserve better.</i></p> <p><i>The issue in front of us today is to ensure that the veteran patient receives a complete picture of the risks of any drug prescribed by a VA doctor, especially those drugs administered to patients participating in VA research studies.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>

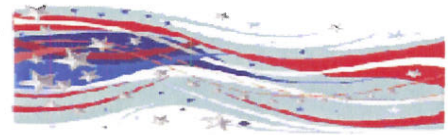
# House Veterans' Affairs Committee Priorities for the 110th Congress




PRIORITY	STATUS
<p><b>Addressing Mental Health Care Treatment &amp; Access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Nearly 40 percent of the veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (324,846) are accessing VA health care. (892,848 total OEF/OIF veterans)</li> <li>➤ Current figures indicate that of the veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom that are receiving VA medical care, 41 percent are accessing mental health care services.</li> <li>➤ While Congress has made much progress addressing the needs for veterans to receive the mental health care they need, the challenges continue to mount. Tens of thousands of service members are being discharged from the military without adequate diagnosis or treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).</li> <li>➤ The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has conducted a series of hearings to investigate the methods of accountability at the VA in response to a series of recent events, including an e-mail suggesting that VA providers downgrade the diagnosis of PTSD to "adjustment disorders" and leaders at the VA attempting to manipulate suicide data to portray a lesser problem.</li> </ul> <p><b>Talking Points:</b></p> <p><i>The increasing rate of veteran suicide is not a bureaucratic situation that only concerns numbers – this is a matter of life and death for the veterans of this Nation. If we do not admit to the problem or try to understand the problem, then the problem will continue and people will die. If that isn't criminal negligence, than what is?</i></p> <p><i>We need to be positioning ourselves <u>now</u> to provide the assistance that our veterans need. In order to reach out to all veterans, the VA must have an outreach plan and work with Congress to ensure it has the resources to execute that plan. We know that the images of war trigger reactions in veterans from past conflicts. We need to go find Vietnam veterans and help them. We need to find veterans of the Iraq War and help them. We are not reaching the people that need the help.</i></p> <p><i>Currently, there are no <b>mandatory evaluations</b> for our troops and veterans. Our troops and veterans should be participating in evaluations that would entail spending one hour with a qualified mental health care professional who could interview and observe the soldier or veteran. I think the best approach is while on active duty, <u>DOD should provide an evaluation</u>, not a screening using a questionnaire, and the <u>VA should provide the veteran consistent follow-up evaluations</u>. Right now, they are leaving the military with undiagnosed TBI and PTSD, which causes enormous problems for themselves, their communities, and their families. I think we have a long way to go and the need is so great.</i></p>	

# House Veterans' Affairs Committee

## Priorities for the 110th Congress



PRIORITY	STATUS
<p><b>Caring for Our Wounded Warriors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ After the conditions at Walter Reed were uncovered to reveal subpar living conditions and an overly bureaucratic process of transition from the military to care at the VA, House Democrats passed the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act. Provisions from this comprehensive bill were signed into law in the National Defense Authorization Act in January 2008.</li> <li>➤ House Democrats have worked to craft and pass legislation to improve the transition from active duty to veterans' status and improve VA health care for returning service members suffering from mental health stressors, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).</li> <li>➤ The new law improves and expands VA's ability to care for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with traumatic brain injury (TBI), including research, screening, care coordination, and working with non-VA providers to provide the care needed by our veterans.</li> <li>➤ The new law also provides an additional three years of access to free VA health care for returning service members from Iraq and Afghanistan (for a total of five years).</li> </ul> <p><b>Talking Points:</b>  <i>Our troops deserve a seamless transition from active duty to the VA system. The majority of returning wounded will enter the VA system for their medical care and it is our test as a nation to provide the finest and most timely medical attention for our troops and veterans.</i></p>	
<p><b>Addressing Housing Needs for Veterans</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2008 has been signed into law. This comprehensive initiative prohibits foreclosure of property owned by a service member for nine months following a period of military service, provides a temporary increase to VA home loan limits, and provides funding for a VA grant program that assists disabled veterans needing to adapt their homes to accommodate their disabilities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Talking Points:</b>  <i>For many of our returning service members and veterans, the stress of deployment is still prevalent when they return home. This new law will provide these heroes with not only the necessary time to readjust, but will also ensure they have the opportunity to do this in the comfort and security of their own home.</i></p> <p><i>All too often, our veterans come home from fighting a war to face another war of keeping their homes. Veterans injured on the battlefield deserve to come home and focus on healing – not on fighting to keep their families in their homes. The number of homeless veterans today is atrocious and a national disgrace. There is much more that needs to be done to support our veterans as they transition from the battlefield back into their communities.</i></p>	