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March 27, 2007

The Democratic Budget: Defending Our Nation

Overview — After six years of failing to sufficiently address some of our most pressing security needs, the Majority budget provides the necessary resources to meet critical threats to the Nation and to deliver excellent health care to those who have served.

The Majority Budget Provides Sufficient Funding for National Defense and Calls for a Shifting of Resources to Address the Nation's Most Pressing Security Needs — The Majority budget calls for shifting funds from missile defense and satellite acquisition, and savings from implementing GAO-recommended initiatives to combat wasteful spending, to Cooperative Threat Reduction (a 9/11 Commission recommendation), to mitigate shortfalls at Walter Reed and other health care facilities, to eliminate Tricare fee increases, and to ensure adequate benefits for the troops (such as pay increases to retain experienced personnel).

The Majority Budget Provides More for Key Homeland Security Budget Functions — The Majority budget provides more for 2008 than the President's budget for the four budget functions that fund the bulk of non-DoD homeland security initiatives. These additional funds could be used for a number of critical priorities, including:

- **9/11 Commission Recommendations** — H.R. 1 authorizes funds to implement the 9/11 commission recommendations. Among them include: increase efforts to screen cargo on passenger aircraft, scanning shipping containers in foreign ports, and enhancing interoperable communications.
- **First responders** — The Majority budget places high priority on rejecting the President's cuts to first responder programs, which include:
 - ▶ Local Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention grants (cut \$112 million)
 - ▶ State Homeland Security Grant Program (cut \$338 million)
 - ▶ Urban Area Security Initiative (cut \$170 million)
 - ▶ Firefighter assistance grants (cut \$362 million)
 - ▶ Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (cut \$115 million)
 - ▶ Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (cut \$170 million)
 - ▶ Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) (cut \$510 million)
- **Port Security** — The President's budget included only \$210 million for port security grants, \$190 million short of the authorized level of \$400 million per year. Additional funding provided in the Majority budget in Function 450 (Community and Regional Development) could be used to address these needs.

The Majority Budget Increases Veterans' Health Care — The Majority budget provides the funding needed to meet our obligations to our veterans. It provides \$43.1 billion for 2008, \$6.6 billion more than 2007 and \$5.4 billion more than the CBO baseline projection. The Majority budget provides \$3.5 billion more than the President's budget and increases funding for veterans each year. These additional resources will cover

increases in the costs of health care, the VA's increasing patient load, including veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, and help cover the cost of forthcoming recommendations to improve military and veterans' health care facilities and treatment.

More Funding for Mental Health and Traumatic Injuries — The Majority budget increases funding above the President's budget for researching and treating the following conditions with which many Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have been diagnosed:

- Mental health problems,
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,
- Traumatic brain injuries, and
- Spinal cord injuries.

Rejects the President's Proposed Fee Increases for Veterans' Health Care — The Majority budget saves veterans from paying \$2.3 billion in increased fees over five years. The President's budget proposes increasing fees on Priority 7 and Priority 8 veterans totaling \$355 million in 2008 and \$2.3 billion over five years. The Congress has rejected these fee increases four years in a row.

Increases Funding to Speed Disability Claims Processing — The Majority budget increases funding above the President's budget for VA to reduce its inventory of pending claims, and improve the speed and accuracy of its disability claims processing. The mark allows VA to hire many more new personnel than the President's budget.

VA is Treating More Patients Every Year and 2.4 Million More than Ten Years Ago — There are currently more than 23 million veterans. Although the number of veterans is declining, the number of VA patients is rising. Over the ten years between 1996 and 2006, the number of VA patients increased from about 3 million to more than 5.4 million (an increase of 2.4 million or 80 percent). For 2008, VA projects 5.8 million patients.

VA is Treating Many More Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans Each Year — VA treated just under 14,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans in 2003. In 2006, VA treated about 155,000, a ten-fold increase (increase of 141,000). For 2008, VA expects to treat more than 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.

The President's Budget is Inadequate to Meet Growing VA Health Care Challenges — While the President's budget for 2008 is \$3.1 billion more than 2007, it is not enough to cover increases in health care costs and the number of patients. After 2008, the President's budget cuts funding for veterans for a net reduction of \$3.6 billion over five years.