

**WRONG PRIORITIES AT  
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION  
U.S. REP. FRANK PALLONE, JR.**

**Mr. Speaker, despite the Bush administration finally admitting that veterans' healthcare is underfunded by \$1 billion, yesterday we learned that V.A.'s main priority has absolutely nothing to do with veterans. Instead, the number one priority surrounds a picture of V.A. Secretary Jim Nicholson.**

**On May 27th an Undersecretary at V.A. sent a memo out to all veterans' facilities around the nation voicing concern that a large number of them did not have the most current picture of Secretary Nicholson hanging in their facilities.**

**In the memo, the undersecretary writes (and I'm quoting) "We are asking that you give this your highest priority. We will continue to ask for daily updates on the status until we are assured that all of our facilities have a current picture displayed."**

**Are they kidding? At a time when the Department of Veterans' Affairs is forcing drastic veterans' cuts, do they really want their officials out at their facilities concentrating on the best place to display a picture of the V.A. Secretary?**

**Here's the response from an official at one of the V.A.'s facilities (and I'm quoting) "And here we're trying to figure out where our next patient meal is coming from and what furniture to sell to buy drugs next year."**

**Mr. Speaker, while Washington Republicans are willing to support our troops while they're at war, they are unwilling to properly support them when they return from the battlefield as veterans.**

**Last week, the Bush administration finally released budget information that showed veterans healthcare is underfunded over the next year by \$1 billion. Many of my Democratic colleagues have**

**long suspected this funding shortfall, but the Bush administration did not come clean with the information until last week.**

**When Congress learned of this shortfall, House Republicans STILL refused to support an amendment to the Labor-HHS bill last week that would have restored the \$1 billion needed for veterans' healthcare, including the healthcare of some 86,000 veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan.**

**Mr. Speaker, while House Republicans refuse to fund veterans healthcare, the Veterans Administration says its top priority is to make sure veterans' facilities have the most current picture of Secretary Nicholson on their walls. Talk about misguided priorities.**

**Rather than worrying about a picture of Secretary Nicholson, shouldn't the V.A. be focusing on how it's going to continue to provide promised services to our nation's veterans? At a time that thousands of soldiers are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan as**

**new veterans, you would think House Republicans would be willing to stand behind its promise to provide necessary health care to these new veterans.**

**Mr. Speaker, it is sad Washington Republicans are unwilling to give America's veterans the support they deserve. America's veterans should be outraged by the treatment they're now receiving from the Bush administration and House Republicans.**