



March 21, 2007

All Representatives
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 20,000 members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), I am writing to request your support for a provision of the emergency supplemental bill that includes funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This provision provides \$1.7 billion for initiatives to address the healthcare needs of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans.

As the nation enters the fifth year of the war on terrorism, unforeseen challenges for the VA have arisen. This \$1.7 billion in additional funding will afford VA the ability to meet these challenges and to position itself to better care for returning OEF/OIF veterans, as well as current beneficiaries. Of that total, \$100 million will go for contract mental health care for the men and women returning from the war. This amount, combined with funds already appropriated, will allow the VA to better address the specialized health care needs of these veterans. Programs dealing with traumatic brain injury and posttraumatic stress disorder—\$70 million for the two programs—will greatly benefit from the additional funding. In a recent meeting, the Department of Defense indicated that they anticipate many undiagnosed problems from traumatic brain injury when the service members return home 12-18 months after exposure to an explosion. Although the VA cannot budget for these future needs, they must be available to provide this care when the veteran needs it.

The supplemental also includes \$23.8 million to complete the spinal cord injury center in Syracuse, New York, that is currently under construction. This will accelerate the completion of this addition to the VA's spinal cord injury center network. The VA's treatment and rehabilitation of spinal cord injury is considered the best in the nation. PVA appreciates the efforts of Congress to quickly address this critical need.

Funds are also provided to improve VA's infrastructure critical to fulfilling its medical mission. For non-recurring maintenance, the supplemental appropriation will include

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\$550 million. Non-recurring maintenance has been the first account cannibalized during budget shortfalls identified by the VA in recent years. The bill also includes \$260 million for minor construction to address the backlog of projects at locations throughout the country. Many of the VA's major medical facility construction, repair, and maintenance needs have been placed on hold for over five years, while waiting for the completion of the Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) process. Construction and major maintenance improvements lagged far behind what VA facilities actually needed. With VA medical buildings averaging over 50 years old, they are the oldest buildings in the federal government's inventory of buildings.

On behalf of our members and all veterans, I urge your support for this crucially needed supplemental funding. PVA looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that the needs of veterans, particularly OEF/OIF veterans, are met.

Sincerely,

Louis Irvin
Executive Director

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