



U.S. REPRESENTATIVE
4TH DISTRICT • OREGON

**PETER
DeFAZIO**

**VETERANS
REPORT**

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Official Business

M.C.
Presorted Standard

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**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives**

November 2005

Dear Friend:

As we commemorate Veterans' Day this month, we must honor the brave men and women in the U.S. military deployed around the world, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are in my thoughts daily. Stepping up to defend our fellow citizens and the freedoms we all hold dear is one of the noblest callings one can pursue. These heroes are performing their difficult missions honorably. The same cannot be said of a penny-pinching Congress and White House, who have failed to provide them with the equipment and benefits they need and deserve.

To make matters worse, Congress and the Bush Administration are also failing to take care of these troops when they return home, and failing to keep promises to the millions of veterans who served our country with honor, bravery, and distinction in prior military conflicts.

Veterans Health Care

In February, the President submitted a budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for 2006 that fell \$2.6 billion below the level national veterans organizations said was necessary. Further, his budget would have required many veterans to pay more out of their own pockets for health care, and eliminated eligibility for others. One major veterans advocacy group called the President's budget "shameful." If you'd like to read the statements from these veterans' organizations, please visit the veterans section of my website: <http://defazio.house.gov/Veterans.shtml>

When the House considered the VA spending bill, I voted in favor of an amendment that would increase funding for vets programs by \$2.6 billion by reducing the tax cut for millionaires in 2006 from \$140,000 to \$129,000. The \$2.6 billion raised would be used to boost funding in a variety of areas, including: \$1.5 billion more for veterans' medical services; \$300 million more to improve VA medical facilities; \$67 million more for medical, including prosthetics, research; \$201 million more for medical clinics and long-term care facilities; and \$537 million for administrative functions to speed up the processing of veterans claims. Regrettably, this amendment was defeated. Congress prioritized the wallets of millionaires over quality health care for our veterans.

In June, the Bush administration finally admitted that the VA faced a financial shortfall of at least \$1 billion this year and \$2.6 billion next year. Congress responded by including an additional \$1.5 billion for veterans programs this year. Despite the improved funding in 2005, we must still fight to add money for veterans programs in 2006.

Veterans benefits and health care should be fully funded and guaranteed. **I have cosponsored H.R. 515, the Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act. This legislation would make veterans health care spending a mandatory part of the federal budget with automatic increases guaranteed.**



Reps. DeFazio and Darlene Hooley joined Major General Raymond Rees in September to visit Oregon National Guard members stationed in New Orleans.

Veterans Affairs PTSD Review

Earlier this year, the VA announced that it planned to review tens of thousands of disability claims to determine whether the awards were too generous.

I took the lead in circulating a letter signed by more than 50 House members in support of a provision in the VA spending bill that would block the VA's review of these cases. As I wrote in the letter, "We believe it is a disservice to veterans who served our country honorably to automatically treat them with suspicion...We are also concerned that by requiring veterans to once again document the stressors responsible for their PTSD diagnosis, the VA investigation will reopen the psychological wounds of war for these veterans and result in further disability...It just sends

a terrible message to those who are serving in the military today for the VA to attack and question whether those who served before are entitled to receive the benefits the VA itself previously approved.”

If the VA has internal management problems processing disability applications, it should correct them. But to punish veterans because the VA hasn't had its act together is outrageous.

Bill of Rights for Troops

I am a cosponsor of two bills to improve the health care, education, and financial benefits for our active duty and Guard troops. The bills are H.R. 1565, the National Guard Bill of Rights, and H.R. 2131, the New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century Act. Besides the aforementioned benefits, H.R. 1565 also includes provisions to: improve the equipment available to Guard members, improve communications about deployments, provide access to child care, ensure more robust re-employment rights, lower the retirement age from 60 to 55, and require the Pentagon to fund reintegration offices to smooth the transition of Guard members back into civilian life.

Disabled Veterans' Tax (Concurrent Receipt)

Over the last couple of years, Congress has approved legislation to allow a limited number of veterans to receive both their full disability and retirement pay. While these changes represent progress, **I believe that the disabled veterans' tax should be repealed immediately for all veterans.**

I am a cosponsor of H.R. 303. This legislation would: provide concurrent receipt to military retirees with 20 or more years of service, who are rated less than 50 percent disabled; eliminate the 10-year phase-in for retirees rated less than 100 percent; allow individuals who were forced into retirement under the Temporary Early Retirement Authority to apply for Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC).

I am also a cosponsor of H.R. 2076, legislation to provide full concurrent receipt to disabled retirees with a disability rating of less than 100 percent, but with what the VA terms an "Individual Unemployability" (IU) rating of 100 percent.

And, I am a cosponsor of H.R. 1366, legislation to expand CRSC entitlement to combat-disabled military retirees who were retired on disability before reaching 20 years of service.

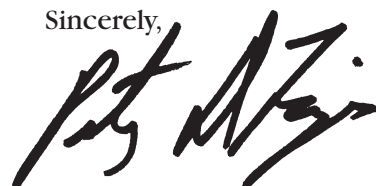
Other Legislation of Interest

I support a variety of other bills that might be of interest to you:

- H.R. 602, the Keep Our Promise to Military Retirees, which would provide military retirees with access to the same health care system available to Members of Congress.
- H.R. 968, legislation to move up the current 30-year paid-up SBP coverage implementation date from October 1, 2008 to October 1, 2005.
- H.R. 808, legislation to repeal the unfair offset and allow a surviving spouse to receive full benefits under both the SBP and the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.
- H.R. 269, legislation to expand eligibility for the Montgomery G.I. Bill.
- H.R. 1358 and H.R. 1588, both of which deal with mental health care for veterans and military personnel. H.R. 1358 would cover mental health care services under TRICARE, the military health care program. The latter bill, H.R. 1588 proposes a more comprehensive approach to dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder, including improving programs to prevent, detect and treat PTSD.
- H.R. 2952, legislation to expand eligibility for qualified veterans' mortgage bonds. Under current law, state veterans mortgage programs can only issue tax-exempt bonds to veterans who served before 1976. Other vets are out of luck. H.R. 2952 would eliminate this arbitrary cutoff and would allow veterans of more recent conflicts, like the ongoing military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, to be eligible for home ownership assistance.

On this Veterans Day, thank you for your service on behalf of myself and all those I represent in Oregon's 4th district. If you ever have trouble getting the benefits you've earned or other concerns with federal government, please write to one of the addresses listed on the left or call my office toll-free at 1-800-944-9603.

Sincerely,



Rep. DeFazio talks with veterans at the Lane County Armory Groundbreaking last summer.

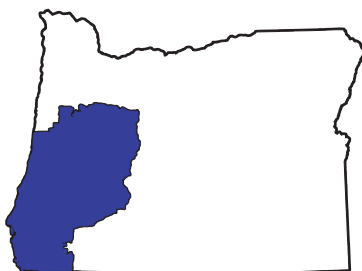
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■ FOURTH DISTRICT

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<http://defazio.house.gov>