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U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS
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 WASHINGTON, DC 20515
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December 29, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
 Speaker
 H-232, The Capitol
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madame Speaker:

As we begin the 111th Congress with the prospect of an additional stimulus package, we believe it is vitally important to focus a significant effort on investments to promote economic recovery for those who protect our freedom and way of life - America's veterans.

We understand that a new stimulus package would seek to jump start the economy with major construction and employment programs. By providing additional funds for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) construction projects, we will create new jobs and upgrade VA's aging health care infrastructure. Other initiatives we propose will stimulate demand for home loans, and improve education and training opportunities that will benefit both veterans and employers.

The veterans' community has a highly diverse profile.

- There are approximately 23.4 million veterans of whom 1.7 million are women and 4.9 million are minorities.
- 14.5 percent of the 27 million small businesses are owned by veterans. Nearly 7 percent of these veterans are service-disabled. In addition, 22 percent of veterans were either purchasing or starting a new business, or considering doing so.
- 651,000 veterans are now unemployed. Unemployment varies widely by age but most seriously affects our youngest veterans (14.1 percent among veterans ages 20 to 24 and 7.8 percent among veterans ages 25 to 34).
- Approximately 1.7 million men and women have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Of those, 451,669 are members of the National Guard and Reserves.
- 7.2 million veterans are enrolled in the VA healthcare system.
- 541,000 veterans and dependents are receiving VA education benefits.
- 2.95 million veterans now receive service-connected disability compensation and another 318,000 wartime veterans receive nonservice-connected pensions.
- Veterans continue to represent a significant portion of the homeless community. VA estimates that on any night, there are 154,000 veterans without housing. Homeless providers report a growing number of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan seeking shelter.

As Congress moves forward, we strongly urge you to include a broad set of veterans initiatives in the forthcoming stimulus bill. We propose the following:

- \$1 billion per year in VA small business loan guarantees for veterans. This would reauthorize the VA small business loan guarantee program that expired in 1986.
- \$21 million per year to increase funding for the Department of Labor's Veterans Work Investment Program (VWIP). This triples funding for a program to retrain veterans in skills relevant to today's job market.
- \$10 million per year for a new Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program – Women (HVRP-W) for providers who focus on sheltering homeless women veterans with children and putting them back to work.
- \$325 million per year to increase the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) basic monthly living stipend from the current \$520 to \$1,200 per month. Current benefits are not sufficient to support a family during long term training.
- \$36.8 million to carry out section 804 of Public Law 109-461 authorizing VA to enter into an agreement for the planning and design of a co-located, joint-use medical facility in Charleston, South Carolina with the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) to replace the existing VA medical center.
- \$736.1 million as identified by VA for additional fiscal year 2009 construction/infrastructure projects (see attachment). This includes:
 - \$133.2 million for major construction - \$101 million for the advanced planning fund, \$18.5 million for physical security and \$13.7 million for the cemetery expansion and medical facility improvements in St. Louis, MO that are underway;
 - \$171.2 million for 53 VHA minor construction projects and \$1.8 million for 5 NCA projects in Riverside, Los Angeles, Roseburg NMC Pacific and Fort Rosecrans;
 - \$428.1 million for non-recurring maintenance projects;
 - \$3.2 million for additional monument and memorial repairs, and
 - \$124.9 million for energy projects that include the installation of rooftop solar panels at twelve different VA facilities in AZ, CA, CT, ME, NV, NY; TX, VT, and WY; a wind turbine project in Big Springs, TX; a direct geothermal project in Reno NV; and renewably fueled electric/steam generation at 50 sites.
- \$118 million in additional funding for solar electric roof applications as proposed in the Buyer amendment to the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2009.

Any legislative action to stimulate the economy should include the above mentioned investments totaling \$2.25 billion. Each of these initiatives would benefit our veterans and stimulate the overall economy.

Sincerely,



Steve Buyer
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans Affairs



Cliff Stearns
Deputy Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans Affairs

Attachment

cc: Honorable Barack Obama, President-elect
Honorable John Boehner, Republican Leader

ATTACHMENT

VA Construction Stimulus Package

Additional FY09 Projects

Major		
VHA	\$119,500,000	Advance planning for additional planning and design requirements on existing major construction projects (funded prior to FY 09), and for FY 09 projects (including the projects Congress funded using additional amounts over the Administration's budget request). Includes physical security projects
NCA	\$13,700,000	St Louis, MO cemetery expansion and VAMC improvements
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$133,200,000</i>	
Minor		
VHA	\$169,399,000	53 projects as determined by VA in AR, AZ, CA, DC, FL, ID, IL, KS, LA, MA, MI, MO, NC, NY, OH, OR, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, WA, WI, WV, WY
NCA	\$1,820,000	5 projects as determined by VA in CA, OR and HI
VBA Energy	\$300,000	Environmental energy projects at all facilities
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$171,519,000</i>	
Non-Recurring Maintenance (NRM)		
VHA	\$300,000,000	1/3 of Facility Condition Assessment (FCA) projects
VHA Energy	\$119,333,000	12 Rooftop solar photovoltaic power projects in NY, CT, CA, AZ, NV, WY. Wind turbine project in TX. Geothermal energy project in NV. Renewable fuel studies at 37 sites to be determined. Conservation programs in KS, MO, OR, WA, CA, NV, NY, MD, OH, WV, AZ, TX.
NCA	\$3,569,000	45 projects in 23 states
NCA Energy	\$5,240,000	Wind turbine project in MA, rooftop solar projects in NY and CA, selected energy and water conservation projects at all 150 cemeteries.
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$428,142,000</i>	
Memorial and Monument Repairs		
NCA	\$3,227,000	Monument and shrine repairs and related equipment purchases
Total construction stimulus FY09	\$736,088,000	