

## Dems boost funding for Veterans neglected by "mishandling" of Iraq War, Walter Reed

by Bend\_Weekly\_News\_Sources

Senate Democrats today discussed their proposal to increase funding for veterans beyond what is currently proposed in the president's inadequate budget.

The budget proposed by Senate Democrats keeps promises to America's veterans by dedicating \$3.5 billion more than the Bush budget allots, the Senate Democratic Communications Center said.

Walter Reed Army Medical Center Democrats are stepping up to support those who sacrifice the most as the Bush administration neglects America's veterans, the senators said. They pointed to the mismanagement of the war in Iraq and the failure to provide appropriate care and treatment to injured soldiers, including an internal report revealing shameful maintenance problems in the Veterans' Affairs vast network of 1,400 health clinics and hospitals. The review found mold in patient care areas, leaky roofs and instances of bat colonies in health facilities.

Lt. Brady Van Engelen, an Iraq war veteran and former Walter Reed outpatient, and Joseph A. Violante, national legislative director of Disabled American Veterans, joined Senators Daniel Akaka, Patty Murray, Debbie Stabenow and Amy Klobuchar in proposing the increased support.

"Caring for returning servicemembers and veterans must be considered an inherent cost of war, not an afterthought," Akaka said. "For years, President Bush has funded his wars through emergency War Supplemental packages he has submitted to Congress. Those appropriations have increased funding for the wars, but not for the care veterans will need once they leave the military. The sad truth is, more war means more wounded warriors, needing serious medical and rehabilitative care. The pending Budget Resolution passed by Chairman Conrad and his colleagues on the Budget Committee finally proposes to fund VA health care appropriately for these new wars."

Said Murray: "As we begin the fifth year of this war, the lack of administration spending on our nation's veterans is everywhere you look. Whether it is veterans struggling to get mental healthcare, long waiting lines for initial benefits claims, or a lack of focus on TBI care, we are seeing what happens when veterans care does not get the funding it deserves. By increasing funding for veterans, this budget does what the administration has long failed to do -- recognize our service members as a cost of this war."

"No group of individuals deserves our respect, support and admiration as Americans more than those who selflessly and voluntarily choose to wear the uniform," Stabenow said. "They put their lives on the line for us every day, and all they ask in return is that when they come home from the battlefield that their nation will take care of them. We must consider the ongoing cost of medical care for America's veterans as part of the continuing cost of national defense, and our budget does just that."

"At a time when we are spending billions on wars and reconstruction projects overseas, we can certainly afford this increase in veterans funding at home," added Klobuchar. "The VA funding in this resolution is just the first in a series of payments towards that debt that we owe these soldiers on the front lines who have sacrificed for us."

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