Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 17, 2003

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Earlier this week, you submitted a supplemental funding request of $87 billion to pay for our ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. As veterans of military service, we stand behind our troops 100 percent and will provide them with the resources they need in order to make sure we succeed in Iraq; the stakes for our troops and our national security are too high for us to fail.

However, we are concerned that as the Administration asks for additional resources for these ongoing military operations and additional sacrifices from our men and women in uniform, the Administration has paid much less attention to ensuring that these American heroes receive the support and resources they and their families deserve.

Although we appreciate the Administration's reversal of its decision to cut the compensation of our troops deployed abroad by eliminating $75 a month in additional danger pay and $150 a month in additional separation allowance for military families, much more needs to be done.

We would hope that, in light of the ongoing sacrifices made by members of our military, the Administration would finally drop its longstanding objections to fully ending the Disabled Veterans Tax (concurrent receipt). Veterans who retire with 20 years of honorable service and have been disabled while in the military should be allowed to collect both their retirement pension and their disability compensation. We urge you to join us eliminating this tax on disabled veterans and authorize full payment of both retirement pay and disability compensation to half a million disabled military retirees.

In addition, 130,000 veterans are waiting six months or more for an appointment at VA hospitals. We hope the Administration will finally support bipartisan proposals to increase funding for the VA by $1.8 billion and withdraw your proposals to increase premiums and prescription drug copayments for veterans seeking to access health care. Your Administration's new cost sharing

requirements would force hundreds of thousands of veterans who have served their country honorably out of the health care system entirely.

We hope that you will join us in making sure that all members of our military – those serving on active duty as well in the National Guard and Reserves – and their families have access to high-quality health insurance through TriCare. In light of the increasing demands we are making on our Guard and Reserve personnel in Iraq and elsewhere, we believe they deserve access to health care and are hopeful the Administration will reconsider its opposition to this proposal.

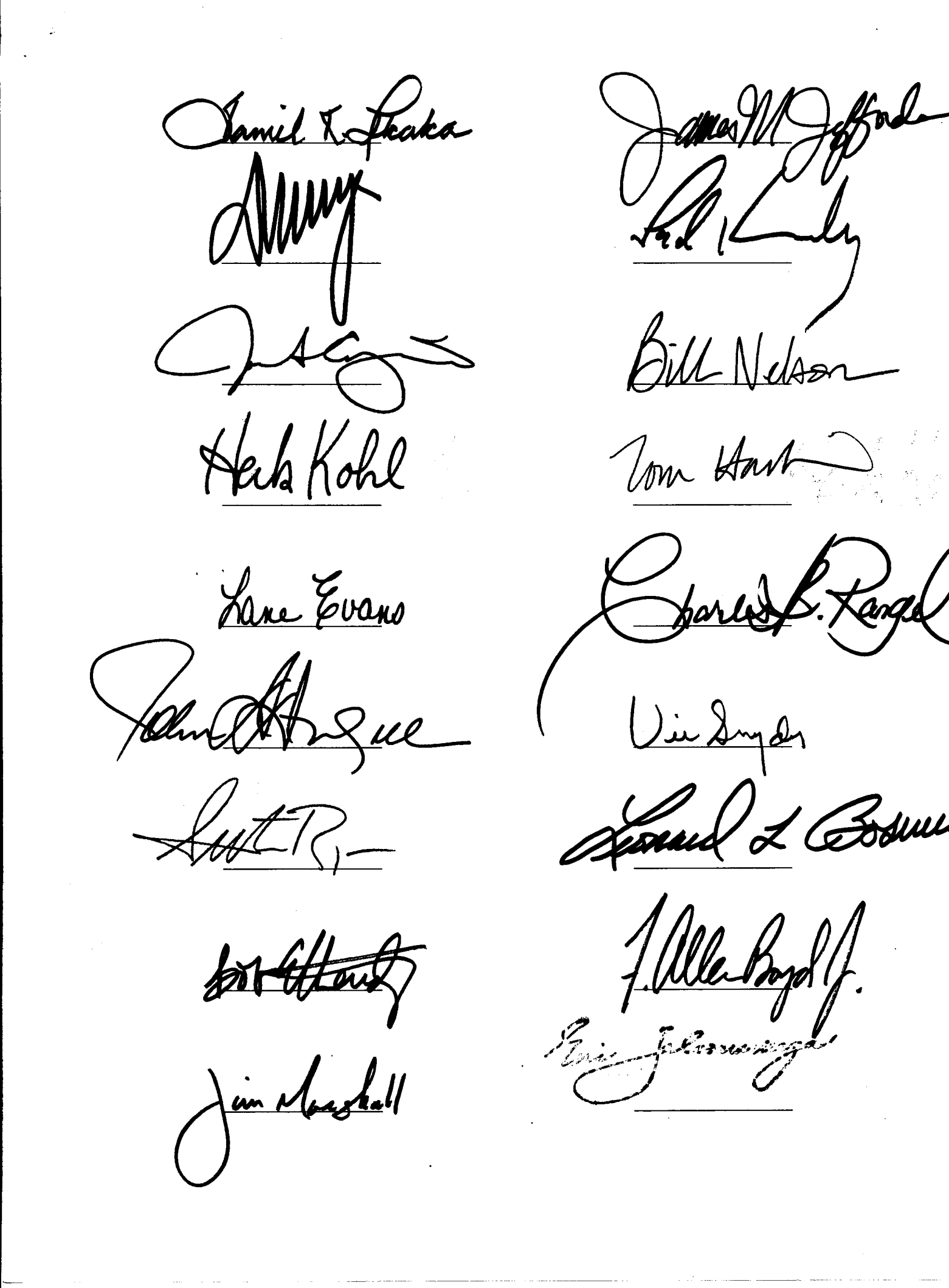
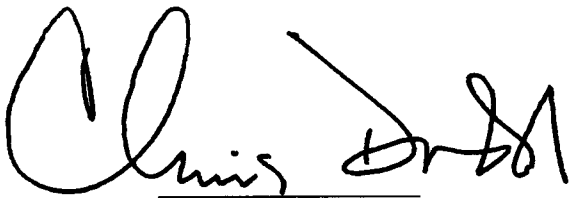
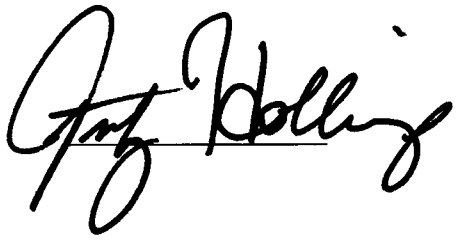
Finally, we hope that you will use your influence to ensure that we can expand the child tax credit to the 12 million children, including the one million children in military families, who were left out of the Republican tax cut bill. There is no reason why this extra help should be denied to military families already struggling with the extra responsibilities asked of them due to our actions overseas.

America's soldiers are fighting for our freedom overseas. They and their families shouldn't have to fight the government to receive the benefits they deserve. As veterans, we know that strong words in support of our military and our veterans are a poor substitute for strong action on their behalf.

We hope that you will join us in our efforts to provide fair pay, good health benefits, and a secure retirement for those who serve in the military. Only then can we be sure that America will be able to continue to attract the best and the brightest to join the world's most capable military force.

Sincerely,

Tom Daschle

Frank R. Lautenberg

Jack Reed