



Veteran's Day 2003
Honoring Our Commitments
House Republican Conference

VETERAN ACCOMPLISHMENT LIST



Honoring Our Nation's Veterans

Our nation's veterans selflessly stood in harm's way as the guardians of our most fundamental freedoms - life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Congress has worked hard with our Commander-in-Chief to support the values and principles our veterans share. Republicans will continue to proudly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our nation's veterans and their families by delivering on our responsibilities now and in the future.



The Republican-led Congress Has...

✓ *Provided Record Funding for Veteran Programs*

- *The FY 2004 VA-HUD Appropriations Act* (Passed the House July 2003) provides \$27.2 billion in total budgetary resources for the Veterans Health Administration, a \$1.4 billion increase over last year and approximately the President's request.
- This appropriations package includes:
 - \$15.8 billion, funds medical services for veterans with service connected health needs;
 - \$5.1 billion, is for VA's medical administrative costs;
 - \$4 billion for VA medical facilities;
 - \$1.9 billion for medical care for non-service connected veterans;
 - \$408 million for veterans' medical and prosthetic research
- *The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act* (Passed the House May 2003) increases disability compensation rates to veterans with service-connected disabilities as well as dependency and indemnity compensation rates for survivors of certain service-connected disabilities.

✓ ***Improved Job Training, Education and Placement***

- Finding a job and establishing economic independence and security can be difficult for veterans and their families as they transition from active duty to civilian status.
- *The Jobs for Veterans Act* (signed November 2002) reformed veterans' job training and placement programs through a new system of incentives and accountability measures aimed at providing more economic security.
- *The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Benefits Improvement Act* (Passed the House June 2003) provides disabled veterans with assistance in starting and growing small business enterprises.
- The plan also authorizes the use of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits to pay for non-degree, non-credit entrepreneurship courses for eligible veterans at approved institutions.

✓ ***Enhanced Survivor Benefits***

- Veterans are not the only ones who have sacrificed for our nation's freedom. The families of those who have served in America's armed forces have sacrificed as well.
- *The Fallen Patriots Tax Relief Act* (Passed the House October 2003) doubles the death gratuity payments for families of fallen soldiers from \$6,000 to \$12,000. Additionally, it ensures that the death gratuity payment is fully tax-free.
- *The Veterans Benefits Act* (Passed the House October 2003) allows surviving spouses of veterans to be able to remarry after age 55 without being penalized with the loss of widow benefits, such as widow's pension or burial rights.
- The plan also expands the GI Bill to include self-employment training programs to enable veterans learn how to start-up their own businesses.
- *The Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act* (signed June 2001) adds \$100 million in new health care benefits for surviving spouses and extends life insurance coverage to spouses and children to help these families in their time of need.
- The plan also increases the amount of educational assistance for survivors and dependents, as well as the rates of veterans' basic educational assistance under the ***Montgomery GI Bill***.
- *The Armed Forces Tax Fairness Act* (Passed the House April 2003) provides tax-free treatment of death gratuity benefits given to survivors of members of the military.
- The plan also provides tax-free treatment of dependent care benefits.
- *The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004* (Passed in the House May 2003) instructs the Secretary of Defense to review the Survivor Benefit Program (SBP) procedures in order to ensure equitable treatment for the survivors of all men and women who served, regardless of circumstances surrounding their death.

✓ ***Provided More Uniform, High Quality Healthcare***

- Health security is a quality of life concern for our veterans and their families.
- *The Veterans Health Care Facilities Capital Improvement Act* (Passed the House October 2003) authorizes \$1.1 billion over 2004 and 2005 for the VA to carry out major medical facility construction projects to improve, renovate, replace, update or establish VA patient care facilities.
- *The National Defense Authorization Act* (Passed by the House May of 2003) instructs the Secretary of Defense to establish an outreach program to assist TRICARE beneficiaries in obtaining better access to health care—understanding the specifics of the coverage, obtaining more provider information and gaining more assistance in resolving any difficulties with the program that they may encounter.
- *The Veterans Health Care Cost Recovery Act* (Passed by the House May 2003) provides greater efficiency for Veteran Affairs' (VA) to recover costs associated with expenses for care provided to covered beneficiaries.
- *The Veterans Benefits & Health Care Improvement Act* (signed November 2000) ensures quality medical staff through competitive compensation for VA nurses.
- In addition, *The Veterans Millennium Health Care & Benefits Act* (signed November 1999) improves the health security by increasing access to geriatric evaluation, nursing home care and adult day healthcare.
- This plan also extends priority access to long-term care to severely disabled veterans and those needing care for service-connected conditions.
- Lastly, this improvement extends compensation to surviving spouses of totally disabled former prisoners-of-war.
- *The Veterans Health Care Improvement Act* (Passed the House July 2003) expands VA health care services by requiring the appointment of chiropractors. (Although VA has previously been directed to develop chiropractic care programs, to date they have failed to appoint a single chiropractor).
- The plan also extends health care services to Filipino WWII veterans residing in the United States.

✓ ***Assisted Transitions from Active Duty to Civilian Status***

- *The Veterans Education & Benefits Expansion Act* (signed December 2001) expands outreach to veterans during the critical transition period from active duty to civilian status in order to improve their quality of life. These benefits include an extension of preparation counseling before discharge and retirement.
- This plan also improves access to VA services and benefits, such as housing, burial and disability.
- Lastly, the package includes a 46% increase in ***Montgomery GI Bill*** education and training benefits.

- *The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004* (Passed the House May 2003) provides reimbursement lodging expenses for reservists and recalled retirees while serving on active duty.

✓ ***Enhanced Overall Quality of Life***

- *The Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense and for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan* (Passed House and Senate November 2003) provides critical improvements to the quality of life of our soldiers and veterans:
 - TRICARE and Reservist Health Care Benefits—Allows inactive reservists and their family members to become eligible for TRICARE health care coverage if they are receiving unemployment compensation or not eligible for any other health coverage.
 - Meal Allowances—Prohibits service members injured in combat or training from being billed for meals during their hospitalization. Makes this benefit retroactive to 9/11/2001 and provides reimbursement for those who have already paid meal charges.
 - Hazard Pay and Family Support—Authorizes continued payment of per diem for travel of family members of military personnel who are ill or injured as result of active duty service and includes a provision to continue the increased monthly rate of Imminent Danger Pay and Family Separation Allowances through September 30, 2004.
 - Military Family Support Services—Provides \$32 million for the Family Advocacy Program, and \$10 million for the National Guard Family Readiness Program – programs which provide support services to military families, especially those who have faced losses, or who have a family member deployed.
- *The National Cemetery Expansion Act* (Passed House and Senate October 2003) calls upon the Secretary of the VA to establish five new veterans' cemeteries in Southeastern Pennsylvania; Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; Bakersfield, California; and Greenville/Columbia, South Carolina.
- *The Homeless Veterans Law* (signed December 2001) authorizes \$1 billion to help homeless and low-income veterans by providing housing vouchers over a period of four years.
- The plan also provides assistance to help veterans undergoing treatment for mental illness and substance abuse.
- *The Armed Forces Tax Fairness Act* (Passed by the House April 2003) exempts military and Foreign Service personnel from the 2 year residence requirement for capital gain exclusions on home sales. This provision allows military families to exclude up to \$250,000 (\$500,000 for married couples) of gain from the sale of a home even if they were not able to reside in the home for two of the five years preceding the sale because of a service transfer.

- The plan also allows members of the armed forces to keep their Homeowners' Assistance Program or "HAP" payments, resulting from military base closures or realignments, tax-free.
- *The Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act* (Passed by Senate and House May 2003) creates a new Federal offense for the destruction of any structure, plaque, statue, or other monument on public property commemorating the service of any person(s) in the armed forces.
- *The Service Members' Civil Relief Act* (Passed by the House May 2003) strengthens the rights and protections to military servicemen and women such as new eviction protections, better protections against lapses in life insurance, and expansions to professional liability protections.
- *The National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003* (Passed the House July 2003) directs VA to establish five new national cemeteries to honor our nation's veterans: southeastern Pennsylvania; Birmingham, Alabama; Jacksonville, Florida; Bakersfield, California; and Greenville/Columbia, South Carolina.
- *Resolution Recognizing and Supporting the Goals and Ideals of the Year of the Korean War Veteran* (Passed the House July 2003) declares to the nation and the world that the American people will never forget our veterans or those who served our nation during the Korean War and requests the President to issue a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe the Year of the Korean War Veteran with appropriate ceremonies and activities to thank, honor, and welcome home our Korean War veterans.

✓ ***Reduced Burdensome Paperwork***

- Veterans should not miss out on benefits simply because of filing complexities and paperwork burdens.
- *The Veterans Claims Assistance Act* (signed November 2000) creates a more user-friendly VA process and helps veterans prepare their claims as they seek their rightful benefits.

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CONCURRENT RECEIPT TALKING POINTS



Justly Compensating Our Nation's Disabled Veterans

Many veterans have expressed frustration with current concurrent receipt policy, where retired, disabled military veterans are unable to receive full retirement and disability benefits simultaneously. Congress has worked hard with our Commander-in-Chief to support the values and principles our veterans share. Republicans will continue to proudly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our nation's veterans and their families and do all that we can to compensate them for their sacrifice.

Working Toward a Common Goal

- House Republicans recognize the magnitude of the concurrent receipt issue to our veterans, and we will find a fair, fiscally responsible way to address this problem.
- We have worked with the Administration to build on earlier steps and have found the most sensible and comprehensive solution to the issue of concurrent receipt.
- Our veterans have given deeply and heroically – it is only fair that we recognize their service. House Republicans are committed to ensuring that every veteran is shown our national gratitude.

Achieving Continuous Gains on Concurrent Receipt

- House Republicans have a solid record on this issue and are working to make continuous improvements to the situation.
- In the 106th Congress, Republicans included a provision in the *FY 2000 National Defense Authorization Act* to authorize a new monthly allowance to military retirees with severe service-connected disabilities rated at 70 percent or greater who had at least 20 years of service.
- A year later, House Republicans expanded on these provisions in the *FY 2001 National Defense Authorization Act* by making these special payments available to individuals retired for disability by their service.

- Again acting on behalf of veterans, House Republicans expanded these special payments to retirees with disabilities rated at 60 percent or greater and increased payment amounts in the *FY 2002 National Defense Authorization Act*.
- And most recently, Republicans addressed the issue in the *FY 2003 National Defense Authorization Act*, which was signed into law in December 2002. The plan provided for concurrent receipt of military retired pay and Veterans' disability benefits for any retiree who had been wounded by enemy combatants or who was deemed at least 60% disabled as a result of injuries received during combat or combat training.

Ending the Unfair Penalty on Disabled Veterans

- House Republicans have crafted a plan that will provide concurrent receipt for more veterans than have ever been covered by current law—something Democrats failed to do for more than 40 years.
- The plan is fair, responsible and honors this nation's disabled veterans. It represents the most significant, positive step forward for disabled veterans in our nation's history.
- This solution is supported by national veteran service organizations such as:
 - Disabled American Veterans
 - AMVETS
 - Fleet Reserve Association
 - The Retired Enlisted Association
 - Reserve Officers Association
 - Air Force Sergeants Association
 - Non Commissioned Officers Association
 - National Association for Uniformed Services
 - Military Officers Association of America Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)
- Under the plan, all military retirees* with Purple Heart or combat-related disability will be on a path to receiving full concurrent receipt on January 1, 2004.
(*Military retirees are veterans who served a full twenty-year career in the military)
- Under the proposal, full concurrent receipt will be provided to:
 - Purple Heart Veterans—the House plan continues to provide full concurrent receipt to all purple heart veterans who are retired after 20 years and who have a VA disability rating of 10% – 100%.

- Combat-Related Disabled Veterans—Under current law, combat-related special compensation (CRSC) veterans 60% disabled and above have full concurrent receipt through the Republicans’ Purple Heart Plus plan for disabilities related to combat situations. The House plan expands *full concurrent receipt and all CRSC* veterans with a VA disability rating of 10% – 100%.
 - National Guard and Reservists—Very few retired reservists and national guardsmen now qualify under current law for the Purple Heart or CRSC concurrent receipt. The House plan removes this barrier and extends *full concurrent receipt to all retired national guardsmen and reservists* (10 – 100% disabled) who are Purple Heart recipients, or who are CRSC qualified.
 - Other Remaining Military Retirees—Under current law, none of the remaining military retirees receive concurrent receipt. The House plan establishes *full concurrent receipt* to the most disabled military retirees 50% disabled and above (50 – 100% disabled).
- In addition, the plan establishes a bipartisan commission comprised of 13 members – over half of whom will be highly decorated combat veterans – appointed by Congressional leaders and the White House. The commission will perform a top-to-bottom review of the disability system and make recommendations on how to make the system more effective and efficient.
 - The proposal will likely be attached to the 2004 Department of Defense Authorization scheduled to be approved soon and sent to the President for his signature before this year’s end.
 - Republicans fully support our soldiers – past and present.
 - From World War II to Vietnam, from the Persian Gulf War to the War on Terror – Republicans will provide our active military with the tools they need to do their jobs, and our veterans with the proper benefits for years of their service.

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Summary of the Republican Concurrent Receipt Solution

Blue Ribbon Commission

- Establishment of a 13-member, bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission to review the current VA disability system and make recommendations to ensure the system adequately compensates veterans for disabilities they may incur as a result of their service.
- The White House and Congressional leaders will appoint commissioners – more than half of whom will be highly decorated combat veterans.

**** SEE ATTACHED CHART FOR VISUAL OF THE FOLLOWING ****

Purple Heart

- The Republican solution continues to provide FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT to ALL PURPLE HEART VETERANS who are retired after 20 years and who have a VA disability rating of 10% - 100%.

Combat-Related Special Compensation

- Under current law, combat-related special compensation (CRSC) veterans 60% disabled and above have full concurrent receipt through the Republicans' Purple Heart Plus plan for disabilities related to combat situations.
- The Republican solution expands FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT to ALL CRSC veterans with a VA disability rating of 10% - 100%.

National Guard and Reservists

- Very few retired reservists and national guardsmen now qualify under current law for the Purple Heart or CRSC concurrent receipt.
- The Republican solution removes this barrier and extends FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT to ALL RETIRED NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVISTS (10 - 100% disabled) who are Purple Heart recipients, or who are CRSC qualified.

Remaining Military Retirees

- Under current law, none of the remaining military retirees receive concurrent receipt.
- The Republican solution establishes FULL CONCURRENT RECEIPT to the most disabled military retirees 50% disabled and above (50 - 100% disabled).



Fighting the Good Fight: *Four Facts to Know About Veterans Spending and the House Passed VA-HUD Appropriations Package*

#1: Congress Has Accomplished Major Victories for Veterans Health Care in Recent Years

- Veteran's health care has received generous funding increases over the last several years, *an average of \$1.6 billion a year over the past five years.*
- In addition, Congress has improved the veterans' health care systems in countless other ways over the past few years such as:
 - *The National Defense Authorization Act* (Passed by the House May of 2003) which establishes an outreach program to assist TRICARE beneficiaries in obtaining better access to health care—understanding the specifics of the coverage, obtaining more provider information and gaining more assistance in resolving any difficulties with the program that they may encounter.
 - *The Veterans Health Care Cost Recovery Act* (Passed by the House May 2003) which provides greater efficiency for Veteran Affairs' (VA) to recover costs associated with expenses for care provided to covered beneficiaries.
 - *The Veterans Benefits & Health Care Improvement Act* (signed November 2000) which ensures quality medical staff through competitive compensation for VA nurses.
 - *The Veterans Millennium Health Care & Benefits Act* (signed November 1999) which improves the health security by increasing access to geriatric evaluation, nursing home care and adult day healthcare, and also extends priority access to long-term care to severely disabled veterans and those needing care for service-connected conditions.
 - *The Veterans Health Care Improvement Act* (Passed the House July 2003) expands VA health care services by requiring the appointment of chiropractors.

#2: The 2004 House Passed VA-HUD Appropriations Package Includes Large Increases in Veterans' Spending

- The House passed VA-HUD bill is another victory for veterans. It is a plan that adds to the long list of successes from the past few years.
- The 2004 VA-HUD Appropriations Act provides \$27.2 in total budgetary resources for the Veterans Health Administration—a \$1.4 billion increase over last year.
- The package also totals \$60.7 billion in spending on veterans programs (\$32.7 billion in mandatory spending, \$28 billion in discretionary spending), including significant investments in our veterans' health care system:
 - Nearly \$16 billion for medical services for service-related health condition;
 - \$4 billion for VA medical facilities;
 - \$408 million for veterans' medical and prosthetic research.

#3: Funding for Veterans Is NOT Confined Only to the 2004 House passed VA-HUD Appropriations Bill

- Labor-HHS - \$220 million in discretionary spending for veterans job training and employment programs – funding provided by the House passed FY '04 Labor/HHS Bill.
- Commerce, Justice, State – \$2 million in discretionary spending for the National Veterans Business Development Corporation – provided under the House passed FY '04 Commerce, Justice, State, and the Judiciary Appropriations bill.
- Defense - \$15.6 billion for the military health care system, of which it is estimated that the Department of Defense will spend approximately \$3.7 billion in discretionary funding for military retiree health care through civilian providers—roughly \$400 million over the estimate for last year. In addition, the Department will spend discretionary funding on retiree health care through noncivilian providers. DOD will also use \$4.7 billion in FY 04 in mandatory spending on Tricare for Life. All are provided under the House passed FY '04 Defense Appropriations bill.

#4: The Budget and Appropriations Process is Ongoing and Never-Ending

- What Congress is unable to provide one year is placed on high priority for the following year.

- In nearly every way, the VA-HUD funding package builds on our past successes for our veterans and for our communities.
- Is it all that we would ever hope to provide for our veterans, their families and America's communities? No. It is significant progress--one more achievement that will encourage us to return and fight harder tomorrow, next month and next year.
- America's veterans have served our nation in invaluable ways. Repaying them for upholding our values of liberty and freedom seems nearly impossible—yet we continue to try.
- Each year we work to reward their sacrifices. Each year we make progress, and each year we fall short because freedom has no price tag.
- Step by step, bit by bit, we can continue to make gains in honoring their service with better health care, enhanced access to housing and job opportunities, and more generous benefits for their loved ones.

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