

# REPUBLICANS BREAK THEIR PROMISES TO THE MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM IN FLORIDA

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This weekend, families everywhere will celebrate the anniversary of America's independence. As we celebrate, our communities will thank the thousands of brave men and women in uniform, who exemplify the spirit, sacrifice, and commitment of the American people to securing democracy throughout the world. And we will honor our veterans, who have asked so little and sacrificed so much for our country. But back in Washington DC, Republicans have quietly tried to cut corners when it comes to the needs of America's veterans and the courageous men and women in the military. They have tried to cut health care benefits for our veterans, refused to expand health care for men and women in the National Guard and Reserves, and rejected measures to keep them safe when they are fighting overseas. In fact, just this week the Administration admitted that they had underfunded veterans' health care by \$3.7 billion over the next two years. Democrats want to ensure that the men and women fighting for our freedom overseas do not have to fight the government for the benefits they earned when they return home.

## MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM FROM FLORIDA NEED OUR SUPPORT

**Florida has 19,456 men and women fighting overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan and 1,788,496 veterans.**

Florida has 1,776 members of the National Guard and Reserves fighting overseas in Iraq, as well as 17,680 from the active duty military. [DOD Legal Residence/ Home of Record for Service Members Deployed, 4/05; VA 10/04]

**Veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserves face difficulties accessing health care.** Over 500,000 veterans nationwide are locked out of the VA health care system altogether, including 47,939 in Florida because of arbitrary enrollment requirements put into place by the Bush Administration. Just this week the Administration admitted that they had underfunded veterans' health care by \$3.7 billion over the next two years. And about 20 percent of all reservists do not have health insurance at all – approximately 6,672 in Florida, leaving them and their families without coverage when they leave active duty. [68 Fed Reg 2670, 2671 1/17/03; VHA Policy & Forecasting 2/24/03, Projected to FY2005; Based on NGA, 4/25/05 and GAO, 9/02; Washington Post, 6/24/05; AP 6/28/05]

**Disabled veterans in Florida face delays, barriers to getting benefits they earned.** More than 47,159 veterans in Florida are still subject to the disabled veterans' tax, which forces veterans to sacrifice one dollar of their pension for every dollar they receive in disability benefits. In addition, there is a huge backlog of almost 500,000 compensation and pension claims, including those from veterans of the current war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Disabled veterans in Florida are still waiting approximately 144 days for their disability assessment. [Democratic Staff, House Government Reform Committee / Democratic Leader's Office, 6/05; Waiting Times for VA Disability Assessments, 7/04]

## REPUBLICANS HAVE FAILED OUR MILITARY AND VETERANS

**Representatives Harris and Keller Opposed Expanding TRICARE to National Guard & Reserve Volunteers.** Representative Harris and Keller voted against expanding access to the military's TRICARE health insurance program to all reservist and National Guard members. The proposal would have expanded military health care to provide access to TRICARE to members of the Guard and Reserve and their families for a low fee, which would have helped 1,776 in Florida. [HR 1815, Roll Call #221, 5/25/05; Leadership Document, "DOD Authorization Previous Question on Rule"]

**Representatives Harris, Keller and Shaw Voted Against \$30 Million Boost for Veterans Health Care & Benefits.** In 2005, Harris, Keller and Shaw voted against an additional \$30 million for veterans' health care. The amendment would have added funding for combat-related trauma care to support wounded troops once they return to their homes, medical and prosthetic research and 100 additional staff to help process claims for compensation and pension benefits. [HR 2528, Roll Call #224, 5/26/05; Leadership Document, "Medical Quality Democratic Amendment Final"]

**Representatives Harris, Keller and Shaw Opposed \$150 Million Increase for Military Personnel.** In 2005, Harris, Keller and Shaw voted against a proposal to the budget to increase funding for military health care by \$100 million and transitional job training for military personnel by \$50 million. [HR 1268, Roll Call #76, 3/16/05; CQ.com vote reports]

**Representatives Harris, Keller and Shaw Voted Against \$23 Million for Families of Men and Women Who Died Fighting the War on Terror.** In 2005, Harris, Keller and Shaw voted against \$23 million to help approximately 4,100 spouses of service members with children whose spouse died during the War on Terrorism between September 11, 2001 and November 30, 2004 by making them eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. [HR 2528, Roll Call #224, 5/26/05; Leadership Document, "Medical Quality Democratic Amendment Final."]

**Representatives Keller and Shaw Voted Against Additional Job Assistance to Veterans Returning from Overseas.** Keller and Shaw opposed efforts to provide extra job training assistance to veterans who are returning from overseas. Four out of 10 members of the Guard and Reserve forces lose income when they leave their civilian jobs for active duty, and many are self-employed or run small businesses. This means they face the daunting task of reestablishing their businesses after their release from active duty. [HR 27, Roll Call #47, 3/2/05; 109<sup>th</sup> Congressional Record, pg. H915, 3/2/05; 109<sup>th</sup> Congressional Record, pg. H2074, 4/14/05]

**Senator Martinez Voted Against Improving Health Care for Veterans and Representatives Harris, Keller and Shaw Refused To Consider \$2.6 Billion Increase in VA Health Care Funding.** Senator Martinez voted against making a portion of VA funding mandatory or automatic, like other health related programs. Martinez also repeatedly voted against efforts to increase overall funding for veterans' medical care by almost \$2 billion. In addition, Representatives Harris, Keller and Shaw repeatedly voted to block efforts to increase VA funding by about \$2.5 billion [#145 S 2400, 6/23/04; #89 and #90, HR 1268, 4/12/05; #40, SCR 95, 3/10/04; H.R.2528, #223, 5/26/05; H CON RES 95, #82, 3/17/05; H.J.Res. 107, #478, 9/29/04; Washington Post 6/24/05; AP 6/28/05]

## THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION BROKE THEIR PROMISE TO OUR TROOPS

**Bush Opposed Better Healthcare For Troops And Veterans, Underfunded Veterans Health Care by \$3.7 billion Over Two Years.** OMB Director Josh Bolten opposed the allocation of "an additional \$1.3 billion for VA medical care and the provision that would expand benefits under the TRICARE Program." Just this week the Administration admitted that they had underfunded veterans' health care by \$3.7 billion over the next two years. [Foxnews.com, 10/21/03; BVA legislative bulletin; CQ, 10/20/03; Washington Post, 6/24/05; AP 6/28/05]

**Bush Proposed New \$250 User Fees and Double Prescription Drug Co-Payments For Veterans.** At least 200,000 veterans would be driven out of the system entirely, including 106,346 in Florida, and it would cost Florida veterans remaining in the system more than \$12,020,626 over five years. [New York Times, 2/7/05; Office of Democratic Leader Pelosi; Budget of the US Government, 2/05]

**Bush Budget Retains Disabled Veterans' Tax, Does Not Do Enough For Troops And Families.** The Bush 2006 budget includes no targeted pay raises for senior noncommissioned officers, petty officers and warrant officers; has no money to fund the 2006 costs of proposed increases in death benefits; and would make no further progress in eliminating the so-called disabled veterans' tax, which requires military retirees to forfeit a dollar of retired pay for every dollar they receive in veterans' disability compensation. [Army Times, 2/21/05]

## DEMOCRATS ARE FIGHTING FOR OUR TROOPS AND VETERANS

**Democrats are working to improve health care and other benefits for our men and women in uniform.** Democrats fought for increases in funding for the VA health care system, want to end the disabled veterans' tax, are working to expand health care through TRICARE for every member of the National Guard and Reserves, and have a new GI Bill of Rights to improve education benefits for veterans. [House and Senate Democratic Leadership, 6/05]

