

REPUBLICANS BREAK THEIR PROMISES TO THE MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM IN SOUTH DAKOTA

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. Democrats want to ensure that the men and women fighting overseas do not have to fight the government for the benefits they earned when they return home.

MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM FROM SOUTH DAKOTA NEED OUR SUPPORT

South Dakota has 924 men and women fighting overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan and 73,400 veterans. South Dakota has 184 members of the National Guard and Reserves fighting overseas in Iraq, as well as 740 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 3,826 in South Dakota because of arbitrary enrollment requirements put into place by the Bush Administration. And about 20 percent of all reservists do not have health insurance at all – approximately 992 in South Dakota, 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]

Disabled veterans in South Dakota face delays, barriers to getting benefits they earned. More than 1,610 veterans in South Dakota 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 South Dakota are still waiting approximately 150 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

Senator Thune Voted Against Improving Health Care for Veterans. Senator Thune voted against making a portion of VA funding mandatory, like other health related programs. Thune also repeatedly voted against increasing overall funding for veterans' medical care by almost \$2 billion. [#145 S 2400, 6/23/04; #89 and #90, HR 1268, 4/12/05; #40, SCR 95, 3/10/04]

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." [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 7,408 in South Dakota, and it would cost South Dakota veterans remaining in the system more than \$8,772,753 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]

