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Democratic Leaders Urge President Bush to Rethink Increasing the Costs of Veterans' Health Care

Washington, D.C. – House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi and other Democratic leaders sent the following letter to President Bush yesterday evening regarding reports that the Administration is planning to increase health care premiums for veterans, which would force 600,000 veterans out of TRICARE, the veterans' health care system.

Below is the text of the letter:

January 25, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are greatly concerned about recent reports that you are planning to reduce defense spending for our nation's military retirees by increasing their TRICARE health care premiums.

Reports from the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW) and others suggest that premiums will double for enlisted retirees and triple for officer retirees by 2009, and these increases will start October 1, 2006. Some in your own administration even report that this proposed fee increase of \$1,200 will force 600,000 veterans out of the TRICARE system, leaving them without the health care they have earned through their many years of service to our country.

It is unconscionable that you would even consider a fee increase on the men and women in uniform who bravely sacrificed for our country, especially during a time of war. We must demonstrate our commitment to our troops and future veterans by assuring them that just as they protected us, we will take care of them when their service ends.

Not only is this premium increase unfair to the military retirees who have given 20-30 years of service and sacrifice, it will not help maintain our military strength. A report released today by the National Security Advisory Group identified serious problems in military recruiting and retention. (Copy enclosed) Cutting health care benefits for our nation's veterans will only exacerbate this current problem.

We urge that, in your State of the Union Address, you disavow these reports and state forthrightly that in the budget you submit to Congress next month, adequate resources will be allocated for health care for both veterans and military retirees. That is necessary to clearly and unambiguously set forth a national policy of respecting and preserving all health care benefits earned by those who have served. Your Administration must not shift additional costs upon veterans or military retirees. Anything less is would be a national disgrace and constitute a pointed rebuke to those who served and have earned those benefits.

Just as our men and women in uniform vow to never leave a soldier behind in battle, so must we commit to never leaving a veteran behind when they need health care.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Nancy Pelosi
House Democratic Leader

Steny Hoyer
House Democratic Whip

James Clyburn
Democratic Caucus Chairman

Lane Evans
Veterans Affairs Committee
Ranking Member

Ike Skelton
Armed Services Committee
Ranking Member

John Spratt
Budget Committee
Ranking Member

Chet Edwards
Veterans Affairs Appropriations
Subcommittee Ranking Member