



**Senator Feinstein Joined Senators Reid and Salazar to Urge President Bush
to Provide Adequate Support for Veterans Health Care Funding**
June 27, 2005

Washington, DC – Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid, Senator Dianne Feinstein, and Senator Ken Salazar joined Dave Gorman, Executive Director of Disabled American Veterans, today to demand the Bush Administration provide the health care needs of America's veterans.

Two months ago, Democratic members of the Senate tried to increase veterans funding by \$2 billion. They were told it wasn't needed. Now it has been disclosed that the VA is facing a \$1 billion budget shortfall and cannot meet the health care needs of our nation's veterans. When the President goes on the air on Tuesday night and addresses the nation, the Senators urged him to say how he intends to restore the urgently needed funds for the Veterans' Administration.

"Democrats believe that if we can find billions for the latest weapons to wage war, we ought to be able to find the money we need to support the brave men and women who fight them," Senator Reid said. "Instead of billions for Halliburton, we should be giving our troops the equipment and armor they need, and keeping our promise to America's Veterans."

"We have veterans coming home by the thousands, many with traumatic brain injuries, amputations and other horrible battlefield wounds that will require care for the rest of their lives," Senator Feinstein said. "That's why this shortfall is so bad. Earlier this year, I voted for an amendment that would have provided \$1.98 billion in emergency funding to the VA. However the amendment was defeated on the floor only after the Secretary of Veterans Affairs wrote a letter assuring that the VA did not need additional emergency funds this year. We now learn that the letter was dead wrong."

Senator Feinstein also joined Patty Murray (D-WA) and 29 other Senators today calling on the President to provide the American people with the full cost of caring for veterans returning home as well as to explain to the American people how he will make up for the budget shortfall.

"We've known that this administration has under funded the VA for four years. It is now clear that there was a disconnect between what administration officials were telling us, and what was really going on. We need to figure out what happened and we need to move quickly to get the VA the money it needs to keep our promise to our veterans," Senator Salazar said.

The letter is attached, and was signed by Senators Murray, Reid, Boxer, Leahy, Corzine, Lautenberg, Johnson, Rockefeller, Kohl, Kerry, Jeffords, Carper, Obama, Durbin, Salazar, Wyden, Mikulski, Feinstein, Feingold, Reed, Schumer, Clinton, Kennedy, Dorgan, Bayh, Stabenow, Cantwell, Harkin, Bingaman, Sarbanes, Lincoln, Dayton, Landrieu, Conrad, Biden, Pryor, Bill Nelson, and Levin.

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June 27, 2005

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

Mr. President:

As you prepare for your Tuesday evening address to the nation regarding our efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, we urge you to take this opportunity to level with the American people about a major cost of these conflicts - the care of our nation's veterans.

As of January 2005, over 1 million U.S. troops have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past 3 and one half years. The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) annual mid-year budget review confirmed that many of these soldiers have returned home and are beginning to access the VA health care system in record numbers, placing increased demands on an already overburdened agency. Many of us saw a looming crisis and sought to take steps that would avert it.

With the recent announcement that the VA is facing a shortfall of approximately \$1 billion in fiscal year 2005 it seems that our concerns are well founded. Unfortunately, the VA's current shortfall, and larger shortfalls predicted for future years, has confirmed that your Administration has not prudently addressed the budget impacts of these conflicts. We urge you to do so now. Only by confronting this problem head-on can we ensure that our veterans receive the support and healthcare they were both promised and deserve.

Adjusted for inflation, the VA is spending 25-percent less per patient than it did in fiscal year 2000. Some veterans have to wait over three years to have surgery. And some VA hospitals are only seeing veterans who have more than a 50-percent service-connected disability. The evidence that the VA cannot function under your proposed budgets and needs immediate relief to provide veterans access to quality health care continues to mount.

War is costly. This is a lesson we all know personally. As Senators we have dealt with legislation authorizing the use of military force, we have worked on spending bills to support our troops, and we have talked to the families of those who have lost loved ones. We also know that failing to provide for the men and women who have sacrificed for our freedom is wrong.

In a September 7, 2003 speech to the nation you stated, "the heaviest burdens in our war on terror fall, as always, on the men and women of our Armed Forces and our intelligence services. They have removed gathering threats to America and our friends, and this nation takes great pride in their incredible achievements. We are grateful for their skill and courage, and for their acts of decency, which have shown America's character to the world. We honor the sacrifice of their families."

Mr. President, we urge you to provide the American people with a full accounting of the cost of these conflicts, including the cost of caring for our veterans upon their return home, during your Tuesday evening address. We ask that you directly share with the nation how your administration will make up the VA's current FY 2005 budget shortfall of \$1 billion, as well as the looming

shortfall projected for the future. And, we stand ready to work with you to pass an emergency spending bill to address this shortfall before the July 4th Congressional recess.

Sincerely,

(Senators listed above)