

Veterans' Issues

California's 14th Congressional District is unique not only as home to thousands of our nation's veterans, but also as the location of one of our nation's premier medical facilities, the Department of Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System. Since coming to Congress, Rep. Eshoo has consistently fought to provide veterans with the benefits they've earned serving our nation, and has worked to ensure the staff and facilities at VA Palo Alto receive the resources they need to provide for our region's veterans, as well as our young men and women returning from service overseas.

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[Keeping Our Promise to Veterans](#)

The Veterans Administration is expected to treat 5.8 million patients over the next year, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Rep. Eshoo continues to fight in Congress for adequate investment in veterans' healthcare and benefits to meet the needs of these troops as they return home, as well as for those who have served before them.

In the 110th Congress, Rep. Eshoo has voted for the largest veterans funding increase in history, real reforms to our military health system and a pay raise for our troops that exceeds President Bush's request.

In February Rep. Eshoo voted to increase veterans funding in FY 2007 by \$3.6 billion to meet rising healthcare costs and account for the influx of an estimated 219,000 new veterans entering the VA system. The increase is part a funding bill enacted to clean up the fiscal mess left by the former Majority in the 109th Congress, which adjourned in 2006 without passing bills to fund the federal government in 2007.

In May, Rep. Eshoo voted for a budget resolution for FY 2008 which provides \$43.1 billion for veterans programs, \$3.6 billion more than the President's budget. This represents almost a \$7 billion increase over FY 2007 funds and is the largest budget increase in veterans' programs in our nation's history. The budget resolution also rejects the Administration's plans to impose new enrollment fees for veterans' healthcare and increases in drug co-payments for one million of our nation's veterans in need.

Rep. Eshoo also voted for an amendment to the FY 2007 Iraq supplemental funding bill to provide \$1.8 billion more in immediate funding for veterans' healthcare to address the pressing needs of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. This legislation will provide troops returning home with mental health care, faster returns on benefit claims and improved care through a reduced backlog in necessary maintenance for VA health facilities. The legislation provides \$2 billion in additional dollars to improve patient care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and other hospitals. It will also improve care, counseling and research for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and care for traumatic brain injury (TBI). One-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan face mental health challenges, and up to 300,000 returning troops are expected to suffer from TBI.

In June, Rep. Eshoo voted for and the House approved H.R. 2642, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Spending Bill for FY 2008. The bill increases the VA budget by \$6.7 billion above the FY 2007 level, the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration and nearly \$4 billion above the President's request. The bill will significantly reduce a backlog of 400,000 claims by adding more than 1,100 new processors. It also provides \$600 million more for mental health, PTSD and TBI than the President requested. All of the major veterans' groups strongly endorsed the bill, including Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Disabled Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Association of the United States Army, National Association of Uniformed Services, and AMVETS.

Overall, Rep. Eshoo has voted to increase veterans' healthcare and benefits programs by nearly \$12 billion.

Rep. Eshoo has voted for several other veterans-related measures in 2007, including:

- H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act, which takes the first steps to address the problems brought to light by inadequate living conditions and administrative hurdles at Walter Reed. The bill improves both outpatient medical care at military healthcare facilities and the transition of wounded service members from the Armed Forces to the VA system.

- H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, which prohibits fee increases in TRICARE and TRICARE pharmacy programs for service members and retirees; restores 2,300 medical personnel and fully funds military health facility maintenance; and launches a Military Mental Health Initiative to coordinate Armed Forces mental health research and Traumatic Brain Injury Initiative for emerging technologies and treatments. The bill also takes another step toward ending the Disabled Veterans Tax, which forces disabled military retirees to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. The bill expands the special compensation for combat-related disabled retirees who have served at least 15 years and have a 60 percent disability rating. H.R. 1585 also provides all service members with a pay raise of 3.5%, which is 0.5% more than the President's budget.

- H.R. 612, the Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act of 2007, which makes those who have served in combat in the Persian Gulf or future hostilities eligible for healthcare for five years after discharge, instead of two years.
- H.R. 2199, the Traumatic Brain Injury Health Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act of 2007, which ensures our veterans are properly screened for TBI, the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, if diagnosed, receive the appropriate treatment.
- H.R. 2239, the Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefit Act, which extends Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment benefits to allow more veterans to begin their rehabilitation earlier and increase their success upon entering the civilian employment market.
- H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act, which allows the VA to partner with state and local governments to reach out to veterans and their families to ensure they receive the benefits for which they are eligible and assist them in completing their benefit claims.
- H.R. 1470, the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act, which requires that chiropractic care and services be provided to veterans at all VA medical centers within four years.

Related Information:

- Veterans Progress Report-November 2007
- FY 2008 Budget and Veterans Programs

The Veterans History Project

Rep. Eshoo supports The Veterans History Project (VHP) and encourages American war veterans and the civilian workers who supported them to preserve the stories of their service to our country.

In October 2000, Rep. Eshoo and the Congress voted to create the VHP at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The VHP archives its collections at Library of Congress and makes them available to researchers and the public. This unique American archive is a valuable resource for scholars and an inspiration to future generations.

The VHP also provides training enabling volunteers to conduct interviews and collect historical documents to share the stories of living and deceased veterans and homefront civilians. To learn more about The Veterans History Project and how you can contribute, go to www.loc.gov/vets/.

Mileage Reimbursements for Veterans

Congress passed an increase in mileage reimbursements for Veterans travelling to VA facilities in order to receive medical treatment. The reimbursement increase went into effect on November 17, 2008. To find out more about the mileage reimbursement increase for Veterans, [click here](#) .

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System is a major tertiary care referral center, providing primary, secondary and tertiary care within a large geographical region encompassing a 10 county, 13,500 square mile area, serving approximately 350,000 veterans. The VA Palo Alto hospital is one of only four traumatic brain injury units operated by the VA in the United States and receives referrals from the entire West Coast and as far away as Texas. At any one time there are from 6-12 patients who are undergoing extensive rehabilitation for traumatic brain injury, or TBI, a wound that occurs in more than 60% of veterans who incur impact injuries in Iraq. These servicemen and women come to the VA after receiving their acute care at Walter Reed, Bethesda or other DoD medical facilities. At the VA Palo Alto hospital, they spend hard months in rehabilitation, fighting daily to get their lives back.

Soldiers and Marines often arrive at the VA Palo Alto hospital unable to walk, talk or even perform basic bodily functions. The dedicated team of therapists, doctors, nurses and other caregivers, in conjunction with the amazing attitudes of the men and women themselves, do perform daily miracles.

Fisher House

To assist these brave men and women in their recovery, Rep. Eshoo led the effort in Congress in 2004 to urge the Fisher House Foundation to build a Fisher House at VA Palo Alto. The Fisher House Foundation is a unique public-private partnerships which builds homes at VA medical facilities for families of veterans and active-duty personnel being served at the facility. Thanks to Rep. Eshoo's efforts, the generosity of local donors, and the excellent work of the Fisher House Foundation, the nation's largest Fisher House opened at VA Palo Alto in April 2006.

The Fisher House at VA Palo Alto will serve all veterans' families who have someone they love going through long-term rehabilitation programs, including traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and vision rehabilitation.

- Fisher House at VA Palo Alto

New GI Bill

The new 2008 GI Bill creates a new permanent entitlement program that would provide veterans with a maximum educational benefit equal to the highest tuition rate of a public college or university in their state, as well as a monthly stipend for housing determined by geographical areas. It also establishes a new program in which private educational institutions would make financial contributions toward veterans' tuition, and the federal government would match those contributions. Veterans would have 15 years to use their educational entitlement provided by this legislation. National Guard and Reserve members would be fully eligible for the same assistance.

The amendment also includes a provision included at the administration's request (and not included in the previous versions of the bill) to allow servicemembers to transfer educational benefits to their spouses and dependents. The amendment contains no provision to offset the cost of the new entitlement. The measure provides veterans with financial assistance to pursue an approved program of study. Payments to veterans would not exceed what in-state residents would pay at the most costly public institution in the state.

The measure also provides a monthly stipend to cover living expenses, which would be determined by the average housing prices of the area in which the veteran is enrolled in school. Qualifying veterans would also be eligible for a stipend for books and other required educational expenses. Payments for tuition and stipends range from 40% to 100% of total costs, based on the duration of service.

Eligibility for Entitlements:

To qualify for the measure's increased educational benefits, veterans must have served between three months and three years of active duty after Sept. 11, 2001. The measure provides veterans with educational assistance for 36 months, equal to four academic years. Under the program, a veteran's educational entitlement would be protected if his or her education was interrupted by a deployment or transfer. A veteran's entitlement would be linked to his or her duration of active duty service. A veteran who served three months of active duty would receive an entitlement that covers 40% of the maximum award. A veteran who served six months of active duty would receive a 50% entitlement, while two years of active duty service would earn an 80% entitlement. To receive the maximum award (equal to the highest tuition rate of a public college or university in the state), a veteran must have served three years of active duty.

Tutorial Assistance:

The House amendment provides veterans with an additional payment for tutorial assistance of \$100 per month. This payment would expire after 12 months, or until a total of \$1,200 has been used.

Licensing & Certification Tests:

The amendment provides veterans with a payment for one licensing or certification test, not to exceed the lesser of \$2,000 or the exam's fee.

Public/Private Contributions:

The measure establishes a new program in which institutions of higher education could voluntarily agree to make financial contributions toward veterans' tuition to make up any difference between tuition and the measure's other payments to veterans for education. Schools would set their own limits on contributions and eligibility. The Veterans Affairs Department would match such contributions for up to 50% of the tuition difference.

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