

Congressman Steny Hoyer joined with several veterans from across the state here to discuss various issues regarding military retirees and their families.

"Sadly, they might not see much, as the budget passed in the House last week slashed veterans' benefits and increased the fees for veterans enrolling in the VA Health Care System," said Hoyer. It is a system that is facing "ever-increasing demand that leaves the VA struggling to provide the care that veterans have earned and deserve."

The VA has seen a 134 percent increase in the number of enrolled veterans from 1996 to 2004. Health care funding has increased only 60 percent over the same period.

"As troops return home from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, the VA will eventually become responsible for many of their health care needs, particularly for those with injuries that may last a lifetime," he said.

As of December of last year, VA had treated roughly 32,700 of the 210,000 veterans from these deployments.

"Further, by law, VA is required to provide hospital care, medical services and nursing home care for any illness determined to be service connected and for these returning service members for a period of two years," said Hoyer.

But the budget, Hoyer said, "instead proposes increasing enrollment fees and prescription drug co-pays for some veterans - a health care tax - and cutting funds for important programs."

He continued, "The budget essentially cuts funds to the VA to pay for trillions in tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthiest Americans and which will burden future generations, without requiring that these tax cuts be paid for so they don't contribute to the ballooning deficit."

Hoyer visits local vets

March 30, 2005

According to Hoyer, the budget provides \$3.5 billion less than veterans service organizations believe is needed.

Disability claims will also not be expedited. Hoyer said there is a backlog of almost 500,000 compensation and pension claims since 2001, and the number of pending appeals have doubled."

"The budget proposal also slashes funds from veterans' nursing homes and virtually eliminates state grants," said Hoyer. "This will leave older and disabled veterans with no place to go."