

CLINTON, MD - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today joined leaders of the veterans' community from across the state of Maryland to discuss issues important to veterans, military retirees and their families.

Among the topics of discussion was President Bush's FY 2007 budget, which proposes a \$250 annual enrollment fee and increased co-payments for outpatient pharmacy services from \$7 to \$15, thereby raising health care costs for hundreds of thousands of veterans.

"As we continue to fight a global war on terror, the most pressing need, according to nearly every veterans group across the country, is health care," Hoyer said. "Unlike other wars in recent memory, citizen-soldiers are fighting on the front lines of this conflict. With more guardsmen and reservists deployed than at any other time in history, the obligation to provide our veterans with adequate care has never been stronger."

Hoyer said President Bush's VA budget proposal raises health care costs for one million veterans, fails to reduce the strain on our troops, and fails to adequately compensate military retirees.

"I oppose Republican attempts to balance the budget on the backs of our veterans," Hoyer said. "I co-sponsored the GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century which would increase our investment in health care, education, and jobs for veterans, and meet the needs of America's military families."

For the fourth year in a row, the budget raises health care costs for 1 million veterans by imposing new fees on veterans, costing them more than \$2.6 billion over five years and driving at least 200,000 veterans out of the system.

Furthermore, the President's budget increases TRICARE premiums for 3.1 million of the nation's military retirees under 65. Premiums will double for senior enlisted retirees and triple for officer retirees by 2009 as drug co-payments increase -- costing military retirees \$2.4 billion over five years.

Finally, the budget would fund 17,100 fewer Army National Guard and 5,000 fewer Army Reserve positions than are authorized by law. “Any additional National Guard forces recruited, equipped, and paid will require taking funds from other Army programs,” Hoyer said. “As many units begin their second or third tour in Iraq and Afghanistan, this budget does nothing to reduce the strain on our brave men and women.”

Hoyer said he will continue to fight for veterans and the families of servicemen and women in the 5th Congressional District. “We have a moral obligation to honor our veterans by providing them with the services they have earned.”

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