



Health Care for Iowa's Veterans

We face a crisis in veterans health care in Iowa. As a Navy veteran and a member of the Senate committee that funds veterans health care, I have worked hard to ensure that veterans receive the health care services they need and have earned.

Veterans health care is a matter of America's values. While the number of Iowans served by veterans health facilities continues to rise, federal funding for veterans' health care has failed to keep pace. That's why veterans' health clinics in Iowa are turning away new patients or making them wait several months for an appointment. Clearly, we are not providing our veterans the health care they were promised and deserve.

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Last year, I fought for a \$1.7 billion increase for veterans health to help put an end to the waiting lists and provide veterans the health care they need and deserve. While I didn't get everything I wanted for veterans, the Congress was able to increase veterans health care nationwide by \$1 billion, \$350 million more than the President requested in his budget. While this increase was significant, it should only be a down payment on guaranteed, high quality health care for every Iowa veterans. The men and women who served America so bravely deserve nothing less.

That's why I wrote President Bush this past January to outline Iowa's veterans health crisis and to ask him to work with me to keep our promise to all of America's veterans. In that letter I told the President the story of Dave Lannaghan, a proud veteran from Davenport.

Last July, Dave Lannaghan applied for medical assistance for his asthma, heart blockage, and glaucoma. While given a high priority status, this Iowa veteran and recipient of two bronze stars for his service at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, was placed on a waiting list behind 5000 other veterans. Meanwhile he pays \$200 per month for medications that the VA should be providing.

"He lived up to his commitment to serve his country; we must meet our commitment to provide him with medical care," I wrote to the President. "If Iowa veterans are to receive the care they have earned, we must take immediate action."

I asked President Bush to work with me, the Congress, and VA Secretary Principi to immediately:

- Release emergency funds to help the VA care for the new patients;
- Reimburse veterans for care received outside veterans hospitals, and allow veterans to fill prescriptions received from other doctors at the VA pharmacies, for as long as they cannot make a timely VA appointment;
- And provide prescription drug coverage under Medicare, so veterans who already have their own doctor will not have to go to the VA for prescription drugs.

While challenges remain, we have made some progress. The Iowa City VA hospital recently opened a new primary care clinic, and the VA is hiring new doctors at Iowa City, Waterloo, the Quad Cities, and Dubuque. I'm also grateful that the President requested a \$1.5 billion increase for veterans health care in next year's budget. That's progress, but it's not enough. Dave Lannaghan is still waiting for an appointment.

I'm going to keep working with President Bush and all my colleagues in the Congress until every Iowa veteran receives high quality health care without delay. Veterans health care is a matter of America's values. It's about time we protected the men and women who helped to protect America.