

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-4304**

July 8, 2002

General Gordon R. Sullivan  
President  
Association of the U. S. Army  
2425 Wilson Boulevard  
Arlington, Virginia 22201-3326

Dear General Sullivan:

Knowing of your interest in legislation benefitting veterans and military retirees, I am pleased to report to you the progress that is being made in the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress. I hope that you find this update letter both informative and encouraging to veterans, military retirees and their dependents in the Fourth Congressional District of Texas.

**NEW LAWS ENACTED IN 107TH CONGRESS**

First and foremost I am pleased to inform you of the new laws concerning veterans that have been enacted thus far during the 107th Congress. The Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, H.R.1291, was signed by President Bush on December 27, 2001. This law, P.L. 107-103, authorizes \$3.1 billion over five years to expand and increase educational, housing, burial and disability benefits, including a 46% increase in MGIB education and training benefits. The Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001, H.R.2716, was signed by the President on December 21, 2001. This law, P.L. 107-95 authorizes \$1 billion to aid homeless veterans and prevent veterans from becoming homeless. On January 23, 2002, the President signed the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001, H.R.3447. This new law, P.L. 107-35, adds new and expands existing health care programs for veterans by \$1.4 billion. The President signed the Veterans' Compensation Rate Amendments of 2001, H.R.2540, on December 21, 2001. This Public Law 107-94 provides cost-of-living (COLA) increases for disability compensation payments, increasing total payments by \$2.5 billion over the next five years. The Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act of 2001, H.R.801, was signed by the President on June 5, 2001. This law, P.L. 107-14 adds \$100 million in new health care benefits for surviving spouses of veterans, and extends life insurance coverage to spouses and children of service members. Last but not least, On May 28, 2001, the President signed H.R. 1696, Expediting Construction of the World War II Memorial by removing delays in the construction. H.R. 1696 is now Public Law 107-11.

**FY 2002 APPROPRIATIONS**

As you may know, on November 26 the President approved and signed the Fiscal Year 2002 Department of Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, which provides a seven percent increase in funding. Of the approximately \$51.5 billion appropriated to VA programs and benefits, some \$22 billion will be for medical care and treatment of eligible beneficiaries and \$25 billion for veterans' service-

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connected compensation benefits and pensions. Also included is an increase in veterans' readjustment benefits, some \$183 million for major construction and improvement of VA facilities - almost triple this year's funding - and another \$210 million for minor construction projects. This bill also appropriates \$100 million for VA grants to states for building extended-care facilities and \$25 million to states for construction or improvement of veterans' cemeteries.

## **NEW LEGISLATION**

More recently, Congress passed three important pieces of legislation concerning veterans. On May 21, 2002 the House of Representatives passed H.R. 4085, H.R. 4015, and H.R. 4514. H.R. 4085, the Veterans' and Survivors' Benefits Expansion Act, would provide a cost-of-living increase in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disability and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses of such veterans. H.R. 4015, the Jobs for Veterans Act, would amend Title 38, United States Code, to revise and improve employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans. Lastly, H.R. 4514, the Veterans' Major Medical Facilities Construction Act, would authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out construction projects for the purpose of improving, renovating, and updating patient care facilities at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers.

## **CONCURRENT RECEIPT**

Many of you have contacted me regarding the issue of concurrent receipt. I strongly believe that veterans should receive both their retired pay and compensation benefits. There are thousands of men and women who have served their country long and faithfully-- veterans who have given and sacrificed much for their fellow citizens. Many have suffered from illness or injury, and it is not right that they fund their own VA disability compensation from their military retired pay. As you may know, I am a co-sponsor of H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2001. This legislation would amend Title 10, United States Code, to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability to receive both military retired pay by reason of their years of military service and disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs for their disability. H.R. 303 currently has 396 co-sponsors and has been referred to the Subcommittee on Benefits. We simply MUST pass this!

The FY2002 National Defense Authorization Act signed into law on December 28, 2001 included two major concurrent receipt related provisions. First, concurrent receipt was authorized, but only if the President proposed, and Congress passed, legislation other than an appropriations act that would provide offsetting budgetary cuts for the increased entitlement costs of the concurrent receipt. Second, eligibility for the "special compensation" for severely disabled retirees enacted in the FY2000-FY2001 National Defense Authorization Act was broadened and the amounts of compensation increased. If concurrent receipt had been enacted, the special compensation would have been repealed, as a duplication of benefits.

On March 20, 2002, the full House passed the House Budget Committee version of the FY2003 budget resolution, which had been approved by the committee on March 15. This would allocate \$516 million in FY2003 and \$5.8 billion over the 5-year period FY2003-FY2007 in mandatory - entitlement - spending for concurrent receipt. The committee plan assumes progressive implementation, to be completed by FY2007, of full concurrent receipt for those military retirees who currently have a 60% or greater disability, with an initial "boost" of 250% in

the amounts of special compensation authorized for such retirees by the FY2002 National Defense Authorization Act. The committee plan is identical to that contained in H.R.303 except that it applies to only 60% and above disabled retirees rather than all disabled retirees. There are currently about 60,000 retirees in the 60%-and-above range, and 440,000 with lesser disabilities. This is a step in right direction-- but we need to finish the job.

## **DISTRICT HOSPITALS**


Many people have also contacted my office regarding the emergency room at the Sam Rayburn Memorial Veterans Center in Bonham. A two year review of the veterans treated at the Bonham facility suggested that the greatest number of veterans were served between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm daily. An average of one to two veterans had been treated in the ER during the nighttime hours, and primarily for non-emergency conditions. It was determined that nighttime staff could be better utilized during the periods of greatest needs, thereby assisting more veterans and reducing waiting times for appointments. The new hours are part of a 90-day pilot program during which the VA can better assess the needs and quality care of the hospital and veterans. The new hours are 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekends and holidays. An administrative officer and nurse staff will be on duty 24 hours per day, seven days a week. If patient is determined to be in need of emergency care, he/she will be referred to Northeast Medical Center at VA expense. I have been assured by the Department of Veterans Affairs that this is just a pilot program and in no way indicates closure of the Bonham Veterans Hospital. Do not be dismayed by anyone's suggestion that the Bonham facility will be closed! That is not going to happen!

As of May 1, 2002 our Tyler area veterans were transferred from the University of Texas Health Center in Tyler to a CRA Associates facility located at 3414 Golden Road in Tyler. CRA Associates is a veteran-owned business specializing in community-based outpatient clinic programs.

I am proud to report that Longview Community Outpatient Clinic has hired two new physicians, Dr. Suzanne Taylor and Dr. Joseph Beraho, as well as a new staff nurse Wilma McCoy. Currently there are three physicians, one nurse practitioner, two registered nurses, four licensed vocational nurses, and three patients services employees. The clinic has reorganized the patient flow as well improved their documentation system. It is very important to me that the veterans and military retirees in the Longview area receive timely care of the best quality, and I am confident the Longview Community Outpatient Clinic is giving that care.

In 2001 the Fourth Congressional District received more than \$111 million in support of more than 70,000 veterans. We have the second highest population of veterans in Texas, and I am honored to be able to represent each of you here in Washington. I am so proud of and thankful for every American who has contributed to keeping this country great and free. May God bless each of you – and may God continue to bless America. With best regards, I am

Sincerely,



Ralph M. Hall  
Member of Congress