



Democratic State of the Union Response Center

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DEMOCRATS HONOR AMERICAN VETERANS

America's veterans have answered the call to defend our freedom and served our country in the time of our greatest need. They have served with honor and deserve the benefits they have earned. As Republicans continue to protect the wealthy corporate interests that put them in power, Democrats are working to better meet the needs of our men and women in uniform and our veterans. Over the coming year, Democrats will work to build a safer and stronger nation.

Democrats are working to end the Disabled Veterans Tax. Republicans have blocked efforts to repeal 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. Instead, they have enacted a plan that takes ten years to phase in benefits and requires two-thirds of military retirees with service-connected disabilities to continue to pay the Disabled Veterans Tax. Democrats want to provide full payment of both retirement pay and disability compensation to 500,000 disabled military retirees and want the law to take effect immediately.

Democrats are fighting to invest in veterans' health care. Right now, 30,000 veterans are waiting six months or longer for an appointment at VA hospitals. Democrats have proposed to fully fund veterans health care and have worked to expand access to health care for the National Guard and Reserves. In contrast, the Republicans have broken their promise to provide an additional \$1.8 billion for veterans' health care this year and support an across-the-board cut in veterans funding that would eliminate health care services for 26,500 veterans.

Democrats oppose new increases in the cost of veterans' health care. The Bush Administration has twice proposed to increase co-payments for veterans. Democrats strongly oppose new fees and increases in prescription drug co-payments and will continue to work to get better funding for veterans' medical care and to meet America's obligation to our veterans and their families.

Democrats are fighting to end the Survivor Benefits Tax. The Survivor Benefit Plan penalizes aging survivors, mostly widows, of the veterans of our country. Military retirees pay premiums for years and anticipate that upon their death, their spouse will receive 55 percent of their benefit. But when their survivor reaches 62, a Social Security "offset" drops the benefit to a mere 35 percent. Democrats want to end this tax and provide equity to the surviving spouses of our military retirees.

Democrats know we must honor our military families. Democrats want to give a \$1,000 bonus for those soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan, make military pay increases permanent for those in imminent danger and away from their families, and extend the child tax credit to the hundred of thousands of military families left behind by the Bush tax cut.

Democrats want to expedite disability claims. Today, there are 348,000 veterans now awaiting a decision on their disability claims. About 87,000 of those veterans have been waiting six months or more for their decision. Democrats were able to secure \$72 million in the past eight months to accelerate claims processing, but Republicans are pushing for an FY04 budget that will decrease the number of claims processing staff by 500 positions.

Office of the Democratic Leaders, January 16, 2003