

President's proposed budget for Health Care in the Veterans Affairs (VA) fiscal year 2004. Americans freedom is due to the men and women in uniform who have fought and continue to fight for us. They are the Nation's heroes, who are one of America's greatest and vital assets, to whom we owe a great debt. One way we can repay this debt is through the provision of good health care to them. Many veterans and men and women in uniform according to the American Veterans (AMVET) will agree with me that high quality health care is one of their most important benefits. Nevertheless, the President is repaying the debt we owe to them by cutting their health care benefits.

The President's budget of \$27.5 billion is \$2.5 billion less than what it cost to provide health care to veterans under current law in 2004. This is as a result of suspending health care enrollment of Priority 8 veterans, which will deny care to 173,000 veterans nationwide. Of the 173,000 veterans denied approximately 7,160 reside in Illinois and approximately 4,000 would have enrolled at VA facilities in the Chicago area. Nationwide, an estimated 300,000 veterans in 2002, were placed on waiting list or forced to wait for over 6 months in order for them to get an appointment for health care. Now we are going to tell over 50 percent of these people who have been expecting this benefit and bleed for their country, that we appreciate their service and are thanking them by refusing them health care access. Denying them health care tells them how much we value their service to the country and their lives. This is incomprehensible.

The budget now requires an additional annual enrollment fee of \$250 for those already in the VA health care system. This will force approximately 1.25 million enrolled veterans including 425,000 active patients nationwide to drop out of the health care system due to the increased costs. In the state of Illinois, there are approximately 105,210 priority 7 and 8 veterans enrolled in the VA health care system, which will lead to an estimated 58,000 veterans dropping out due to this cost. Also, approximately 42,000 Chicago veterans and active patients would be forced to drop out of VA care due to the new fees. This new fee is telling our veterans and active men and women in uniform that their suffering for our freedom is not enough for them to earn health care benefits that they still have to pay for it.

Furthermore, those who remain in the VA health care system, will pay a lot more than they used to pay. In the State of Illinois an estimated 47,000 Priority 7 and 8 veterans will remain in the VA health care system, which will mean that their cost for VA care will increase by an estimated \$16 million annually. Out of these Illinois veterans approximately 26,000 veterans are enrolled in Chicago VA facilities, their VA care cost will increase annually by an estimated \$9.1 million.

Overall due to being excluded from signing up and the increased fee for VA care, approximately 65,000 Illinois 15 veterans, including 36,000 veterans in Chicago VA facilities, will lose access to VA health care. This is no way to treat our Veterans—in fact we should be ashamed. We can do better and we must begin by taking care of those who have given so much—our Veterans.

RECOGNIZING KNOXVILLE NEWS-SENTINEL

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, in these challenging economic times it is important to recognize individuals and companies that invest in our future. Last month, I helped celebrate just such an investment in my district—the state-of-the-art office and production facility for the Knoxville News Sentinel, East Tennessee's largest newspaper.

This paper has been based in downtown Knoxville since its first issue in 1886. It now educates and informs more than 400,000 people every week and supports a wide variety of local civic, charitable and education organizations.

The News Sentinel has taken its community involvement a giant step further by building its \$50 million headquarters in a formerly under-served part of Knoxville's city center and by bringing on-line one of the most sophisticated printing presses in the United States. The paper's parent company, E.W. Scripps, also bases its highly successful cable networks and Internet services in Knoxville.

East Tennessee is one of the best places in our Nation to do business. I applaud the News-Sentinel and E.W. Scripps for having the foresight to invest in this dynamic community.

OUR TROOPS IN IRAQ AND THE FAMILIES AT HOME MUST HAVE STEEL IN THEIR SPINES

HON. DOUG BEREUTER

OF NEBRASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Speaker, as our troops move into Baghdad, countless Americans are watching as embedded reporters use 21st century technology to relay the bloodshed and horror of the battlefield into their living rooms. These images cannot help but have a profound impact on all of us. We would be well advised to heed the advice of Winston Churchill that, "Nothing is more dangerous in wartime than to live in the temperamental atmosphere of a Gallup Poll, always feeling one's pulse and taking one's temperature."

A timely editorial published in the Omaha World-Herald on Saturday, March 29, 2003, reflects the situation Americans face in Iraq and on the homefront. This member commends it to his colleagues, especially noting its recommendations that only unconditional victory now will suffice.

[From the Omaha Daily Herald, Mar. 29, 2003]

BAGHDAD BOUND

Wars, many have observed, don't follow scripts. Certainly the one in Iraq underscores the point.

It is not turning out to be as quick or as clean as many seasoned observers, including some highly placed military officials, had hoped. But as the second week began, positive developments emerged.

The (official) start of the war met with unexpected contingencies. First came one of the worst sand-storms in modern memory.

Only those who have experienced a major and prolonged storm of that kind can begin to imagine what it would be like to pursue a military engagement under such conditions. Another surprise has been the tenacity of some of the Iraqi soldiers. They may not be the best-trained fighters, but desperation and zealotry combined have kept them in the battle longer than many expected.

Desperation and zealotry have also led to some despicable dirty tricks—war crimes, really. Much of this was expected, but is no less infuriating for that fact: Fighting from hospitals. Fake surrenders that become massacres. Forced human shields. Apparent executions of prisoners and Iraqi civilians. And more. But the tide does appear to be turning. Massive bombs are shattering strategic targets in Baghdad. Ground forces are speeding up, and bit by bit they are securing the ever-important supply line all the way back to the Persian Gulf. Helicopters (for which sand-storms are a curse) are back in the air, laying down lethal fire and ferrying troops.

Additionally, thousands of Iraqi citizens, once they feel reasonably secure, have begun to flee to safety behind American and British lines. There they are being fed and medically treated as necessary, affirming that the allies truly are on the scene as rescuers.

None of that makes this a stroll on the beach. Baghdad will be tough to pacify. Casualties among the liberators are rising. Some innocent Iraqis, inevitably, are dying. That makes this the point at which the troops—and we would add, their loved ones at home—must have some steel in their spines.

The only sensible course now is unconditional victory. The allies can win it, and we believe they will. Chapter 2 will be winning the peace.

THE PHASE III IMPLEMENTATION ACT

HON. HOWARD COBLE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Phase III Implementation Act.

I believe the time has come for Congress to find a way to break the current stalemate on the tobacco buyout issue. To that end, I am calling for the creation of a non-federal trust fund—similar to the Phase II trust fund created by the 1998 multi-state settlement agreement—to provide buyout payments to tobacco quota holders and growers. This new "Phase III" Trust Fund would be coupled with tobacco program modernization which is addressed in the legislation I am introducing today.

There are three major objectives motivating this legislation. First, Congress needs to undertake major reform and modernization of the federal tobacco program. Second, we need to encourage a dialogue on alternative ways to fund a tobacco quota buyout. Third, the tobacco buyout and program reform debate needs to remain separate from a massive tobacco product regulatory debate like the one we saw in 1998.

The current program has served tobacco-growing families quite well since the 1930's and has been modified and improved several times through the years; however, the last major overhaul was in 1986, and I believe it is time to take a new look at the program. Historically, the federal tobacco program has worked well to keep supply in line with demand. Since 1986, growers and buyers alike

have paid an assessment on every pound of tobacco grown to keep the program operating at no net cost to the federal government. This approach has generally been strongly supported by quota holders, growers, manufacturers, dealers, and in recent years, even public health organizations; however, certain structural problems have emerged in the last few years to make the program less efficient.

Tobacco quotas can be rented or leased by quota holders. This means that active tobacco growers seeking to increase their production can do so by obtaining the production rights from inactive quota holders. In the last few years, rent and lease costs have risen substantially, and the overall demand for tobacco leaf has been cut in half. Much of this reduction stems from the \$268 billion multi-state settlement in 1998, and fears of excessive federal regulation of tobacco products by manufacturers which has driven export production overseas. In the past two years, there has been much speculation about a tobacco quota buyout. This speculation has caused many quota holders to hang on to their quotas longer than they otherwise might have, making quotas more, expensive to buy and driving up rent and lease costs. At the same time, the price of domestic tobacco leaf has been supported at levels that are incongruous with international prices, making domestic leaf less competitive in world markets. As a result, support for the current program has been falling among active tobacco growers, thereby creating the need for reform.

Under my proposal, growers can opt for a modernized program or eliminate the program altogether, giving growers a vote on this issue. It calls for an up-front referendum for each type of tobacco to decide whether growers move forward with a licensing program that includes a cost-of-production safety net, or no program at all.

This bill will eliminate the current tobacco quota program and create a modernized program in its place. Quota holders would be eligible for buyout payments from non-federal sources through the existing Phase II trust fund and additional amounts provided under a new Phase III trust fund. Active tobacco growers would also be eligible for payments from these non-federal sources and would be issued tobacco production licenses based on their actual production history. The new licensing program would be administered by the Department of Agriculture, establishing licenses that are non-transferable, except to the heirs of the tobacco grower. In other words, the renting or leasing of production rights would be eliminated and tobacco leaf would be sold with a new safety net formula based on costs of production. Finally, growers would be given a vote on a new modernized program or no program at all.

The second objective of my legislation is to stimulate a discussion of alternative ways to fund a tobacco quota buyout. The current debate in Congress is at a stalemate, and I believe that it is well past time to look at alternative solutions. I continue to oppose all federal tax increases as a way to pay for a buyout including direct taxes, user fees, assessments, or new revenues by any other name.

Before the Attorneys General from the major tobacco states would sign the multi-state set-

tlement in 1998, they wanted guaranteed relief for tobacco growers, but they did not come to Congress looking for the money. The tobacco manufacturers and the states sat down and negotiated a separate \$5.15 billion trust fund, known as Phase II, that did not require taxpayer dollars. In this same vein, I believe we should begin looking at non-federal ways to fund a buyout, like developing a new Phase III trust fund with buyout payments made over 5 years. This would require a willingness on the part of manufacturers and growers to come together to find a solution, and I think it is an idea worth trying given that such a solution could potentially be accomplished far faster than waiting on the legislative process.

The third objective of my legislation is to keep the tobacco buyout and program reform debate separate from a massive tobacco product regulatory debate like the one experienced in 1998. I don't believe such a debate can be successfully concluded in the near future, yet group after group continues to meet with our tobacco growers and tell them that they need to accept FDA regulation of tobacco products if they want a tobacco buyout.

One of my major concerns with FDA regulation is its application of medical device language to tobacco products. Language regulating each machine part of a medical device will not work when applied to a tobacco leaf. Instead, it could end up giving the federal government broad authority to reengineer the compounds in the tobacco plant. Our tobacco growers have been pawns in the FDA power struggle long enough, and we simply must separate this issue and move forward to help our growers.

I hope my colleagues who represent tobacco-growing states will join with me in looking at the tobacco buyout issue in a different light. Tobacco growers cannot wait indefinitely for a solution. Let us find a non-federal, taxpayer friendly way to fund a buyout, enact sensible tobacco program reform that gives growers a choice, and move forward so that our farm families can enjoy a more stable future.

REINTRODUCTION OF CENSUS DIRECTOR LEGISLATION

HON. CAROLYN B. MALONEY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, today, I introduce legislation that establishes a 5-year term of office for the Director of the Census Bureau. By establishing a fixed term of office, this legislation would lessen the role that politics plays at the Census Bureau, an agency which should be grounded in the science of counting our nation. Other agencies charged with developing critically important statistical information, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics, have a fixed term for their directors. This policy ensures the most accurate, non-partisan data possible.

IN HONOR OF MARINE GUNNERY
SERGEANT PHILLIP A. JORDAN
OF ENFIELD

HON. ROB SIMMONS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 2, 2003

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share a Connecticut family's sorrow with my colleagues and the nation.

Marine Gunnery Sgt. Phillip A. Jordan, a 42-year-old Marine from Enfield, Connecticut, was killed along with eight other Marines near the city of An Nasiriyah. Sgt. Jordan died on March 23, when enemy troops, pretending to surrender, opened fire. He served America and the cause of freedom honorably in the first Gulf War, in Kosovo and in Afghanistan.

Sgt. Jordan, a constituent of mine, is the first Connecticut resident known to have died in the war. He leaves his wife, Amanda, and a son, Tyler, who is 6 years old. He was laid to rest today with full military honors in Enfield. We mourn his passing but honor his service.

This is an old story for Americans. Since our nation's birth there have been periods of time in which brave men and women have had to step forward to defend our freedom, our Nation and our Constitution. Yet, the timelessness of the story does not ease the sadness that is felt by those who mourn the loss of their loved ones. It is not only our men and women in uniform who sacrifice for our Nation—their families make profound sacrifices as well.

Sgt. Jordan reminds us that the guardians of our freedoms are the sons and daughters and the husbands and wives who volunteer to serve America and the people they love. When called upon, they leave their homes to engage in the dangerous and difficult work that must be done if we are to continue to enjoy the rights we have as Americans. Our men and women in uniform are the threads that bind together our national defense fabric. Without their courage throughout the centuries we would not be in this Chamber today.

It is the soldier and his family who above all others desires peace because it is the soldier and his family who bears the heaviest burdens of war. But the soldier and his family also know that there are even heavier burdens than those imposed by war. They know that there are some things worth fighting for and dying for.

Sgt. Jordan understood the difference between using force for liberation and defense; and using force for repression and conquest. He will take his place among the ranks of courageous and devoted Americans who gave their last full measure for this great Nation.

America will be a safer and more secure nation because of Sgt. Phillip A. Jordan. The America that we love, and that we will not falter in defense of, will forever stand as his monument. He and his family will be in our prayers. We thank them for their service and sacrifice.