

## Military Widows Deserve Fairness

Another promise made to young men and women when they were recruited was that surviving spouses would receive a fair pension upon retirement. However, the military Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) unfairly penalizes the very elderly survivors who are most in need of the full pensions they were promised.

I am a co-sponsor of the Military Survivor Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 548 and H.R. 3763). This is fair legislation that would increase the minimum survivor benefit and restore to 55 percent from 35 percent the basic annuity for surviving spouses age 62 and older. Although this legislation



*Congressman Van Hollen recently held a forum for high school constituents and their families to provide information on nomination and admission procedures at U. S. service academies. Representatives from the Air Force, Coast Guard, Merchant Marine, Military and Naval Academies spoke about academy life and answered questions from students and their parents. Here Chris talks with Coast Guard Commander James Rendon before the forum.*

has over 300 cosponsors, the House leadership has refused to bring it up for a vote, so I have signed a Discharge Petition to force a vote on the bill.

On May 13, in response to strong pressure supporting that discharge petition, the House Armed Services Committee

voted to end the “Widows’ Tax.” The struggle is not over, however, because the Bush Administration does not support this effort.

**NEED HELP?** If you or a veteran you know needs assistance with the Department of Veterans Affairs or has questions relating to veterans’ health care, benefits, special services, or how to obtain official discharge papers and military awards, please contact my district offices: 301-624-3501 in Rockville or 301-927-5223 in Mount Rainier. We stand ready to assist you in any way possible.

Please visit my website at [www.house.gov/vanhollen](http://www.house.gov/vanhollen) and sign up to receive my electronic newsletter.

**Congressman Chris Van Hollen**

1419 Longworth House Office Bldg.

Washington, D.C. 20515

Official Business

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Chris Van Hollen".

M.C.  
PRSRT STD

CONGRESSMAN CHRIS VAN HOLLEN



## Report to the 8th District

### Memorial Day Update on Veterans Issues

Dear Friend:

*This spring I visited our troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan and was impressed with and moved by their commitment and determination. I think of them now, as we dedicate a new memorial to the veterans of World War II, and how we are creating a new generation of veterans who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for our country. As we celebrate Memorial Day, we pause to remember the sacrifices made by all the brave men and women of our armed forces.*

*Last year, on the same day it passed a resolution commending our troops, Congress, in the dead of night, approved the Administration’s budget that would make drastic cuts in the health care programs provided to veterans who served our country in previous conflicts. I opposed this action. It is wrong to cut veterans’ benefits while sending another generation of troops into combat.*

*Supporting the bravest among us, not only by constructing monuments but also by providing for them on the field and when they return from battle – that should be our mission. We must keep our promises to America’s veterans.*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Chris Van Hollen".

Chris Van Hollen

## Full Funding for V.A. Health Care a Must



Recently, by a vote of 216-213 the House passed an FY2005 budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs that does not keep pace with inflation. Over five years, that budget is short by \$1.6 billion from the total needed to maintain services at the 2004 level.

On a bipartisan basis, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs had recommended that \$2.5 billion *more* than the President's budget request was needed to maintain vital health care programs for veterans in 2005 alone.

Failure to adopt the recommendation of the Committee on Veterans Affairs will make it very difficult for the VA to meet the needs of

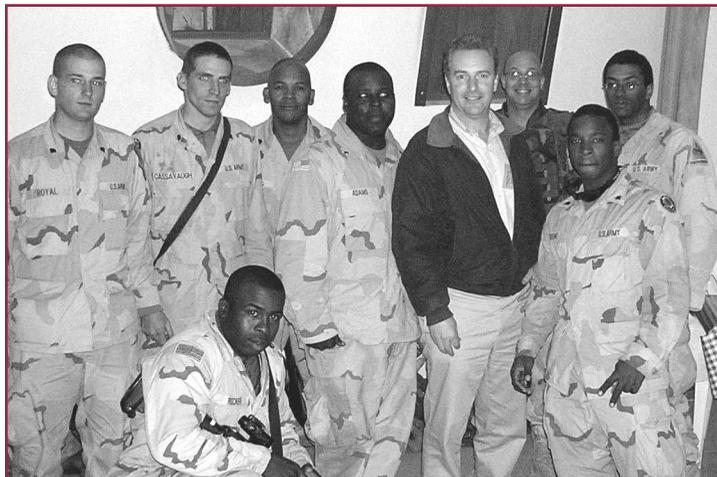
hundreds of thousands of veterans. Nevertheless, the final budget passed by the House was short by \$1.3 billion in FY05 as compared to the level recommended by the Committee. I opposed that budget which short changes our veterans.

In contrast, I supported the Democratic budget alternative that provided \$1.3 billion more than the Republican budget for

veterans' programs for 2005 and \$6.6 billion more over five years. The Democratic alternative would have:

- ▲ improved access to health care and reduced waiting time for all veterans;
- ▲ met statutory requirements for long-term care by increasing the current number of nursing home beds to 1998 levels;
- ▲ reduced or eliminated the increased copayments (\$135 million) and enrollment fees (\$268 million) proposed in the President's budget;
- ▲ increased funds for medical facility construction and renovation; and
- ▲ provided the resources necessary for more responsive reviews of claims and appeals.

*During his visit to Iraq in February, Congressman Van Hollen met with soldiers, including several from Maryland's 8th Congressional District, who discussed with him their challenging mission and he difficult circumstances they face. Congressman Van Hollen thanked them for their service to our country.*



## Keeping Our Promise to Military Retirees

We have sent thousands of troops to do battle in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our government must be accountable for the promises it makes to the young men and women who serve our country in this way. Military retirees — who spent a career in uniform to defend our freedoms — are not asking for handouts; they are only asking for what was promised to them. On November 6, 2003, I introduced the Keep Our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act (H.R. 3474), a bill to restore earned and promised health care coverage to retired members of the uniformed services.

Many people joined the military believing they would earn lifetime medical care in exchange for 20 years of service, based on promises made by recruiters and government officials. Unfortunately, laws passed since 1956 limited the availability of health care



*Chris is working with local veterans to ensure they receive long overdue recognition for their service to our country. Here he awards a Bronze Star to WWII Army veteran Raymond Luhn.*

coverage. For those who entered the service prior to December 7, 1956, these laws essentially changed the health care rules in the middle of the game. To address that problem, H.R. 3474 waives the Medicare Part B payments that are currently required to enroll in Tricare for Life (TFL).

Congress enacted Tricare for Life in 2001 to help fulfill the promise of military health care for older retirees who are eligible for Medicare. But many retirees who do not qualify for TFL still cannot get the kind of medical care they earned under Tricare. To meet their needs, H.R. 3474 provides these retirees the

option of coverage under the same health care plan currently available to federal employees and retirees (i.e., the FEHBP) without paying any more out-of-pocket expenses than they would under Tricare Standard.

A recent federal court ruling has made it clear that Congress can — and should — fulfill its obligation to those who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. A majority of the House has agreed by cosponsoring H.R. 3474. But it is now up to the House leadership to allow a vote on this legislation. I will work hard to secure passage of the Keep Our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act.



*Col. George "Bud" Day (Retired), a veteran of more than 30 years' service in the Armed Forces and the nation's most highly decorated officer since Gen. Douglass MacArthur, stopped by the office to endorse Congressman Van Hollen's bill, the Keep Our Promise to America's Military Retirees Act. Here he speaks about the effort to restore military health care with Ken Cummings and Phil Alperson, legislative staffers for Rep. Van Hollen. Shot down over North Vietnam in 1967, Col. Day spent 67 months as a Prisoner of War.*