

Rothman Calls on President Bush to Prevent Increases in Veterans' Health Care Premiums

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(Washington, DC)—Yesterday, Rep. Steve Rothman (NJ-9) wrote President George W. Bush on behalf of veterans who are concerned about possible increases in their TRICARE health care premiums.

"I am extremely concerned about reports that the Department of Defense is going to raise TRICARE premiums for military retirees under the age of 65, and pharmaceutical co-pay fees for Medicare-eligibles, and Active Duty, Reserve and Guard family members," wrote Rothman.

TRICARE is the Department of Defense's managed health care program for Active Duty military, Active Duty service families, retirees and their families, and other beneficiaries. Reports from the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW) and others suggest that an increase in premiums will be effective October 1, 2006 and fees will double for enlisted retirees and triple for officer retirees by 2009.

Further adding to the concern among veterans, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., this month indicated that the Department of Defense may raise fees because of the Department's increasing health care and weapons costs.

Noting that the President has consistently stated his appreciation for the sacrifices made by our servicemen and women and their families, Rothman asked him to prioritize veterans' health care: "Government should look to improve TRICARE and provide greater funding for this important program, rather than shift the financial burden to those who have already sacrificed so much for our nation."

Military experts and veterans' organizations warn that reducing retirement benefits would jeopardize long-term recruitment, retention and readiness in the armed forces, especially in wartime.

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