

Rothman Leading Fight Against Bush Decision To Deny 4,445 New Jersey Vets Health Care

March 14, 2003

Rothman Leading Fight Against Bush Decision To Deny 4,445 New Jersey Vets Health Care
Rallies Support In New Jersey, Congress To Restore Policy That Ensured Treatment To All Vets

Hackensack, NJ - Standing up for the estimated 4,445 New Jersey veterans who have been denied health care due to recent Bush Administration budget cuts, Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) today demanded that the President immediately reverse his decision and fulfill government's longstanding promise to provide health care to those who courageously risked their lives in the armed services. Rothman, who has organized a coalition of 53 of his colleagues in Congress against the cuts, called on Bush to abandon his move to suspend new Veterans Affairs (VA) health care enrollment of Priority 8 veterans -- those who annually earn more than a geographically mandated threshold, defined as \$38,100 for individuals and \$43,500 for couples in Bergen and Passaic Counties. In other parts of New Jersey with lower costs of living, the income threshold is as low as \$28,100 for individuals and \$32,150 for couples.

"At a time when the United States is on the brink of a war in which hundreds of thousands of our troops will put their lives on the line, President Bush is turning his back on 4,445 New Jersey veterans who courageously served in our armed forces," said Rothman, who was joined by leading New Jersey veterans officials at a press conference blasting the Bush decision outside of the VA clinic in Hackensack. "This decision unfairly denies 4,445 New Jersey veterans access to the quality, affordable health care they rightfully deserve. By doing so, the Bush Administration violates Congress's mandate that the VA should provide quality, affordable health care to all of our courageous veterans when they need such care."

Rothman authored a letter to President Bush in February calling for the Administration to reverse its unfair decision which would freeze enrollment for an estimated 173,959 veterans nationwide. The Congressman circulated the letter among his House colleagues and gained 53 additional signatures before sending it to the President. Bush has yet to respond to the letter.

The VA claims it decided to deny Priority 8 veterans access to care because it does not have the funding to pay for their health care despite the fact that the VA's budget for health care has been steadily increasing. Rothman, a member of the House Appropriations Committee, and his colleagues in Congress took the unusual step of approving \$417 million in supplemental funds for VA medical care in Fiscal Year 2002. Despite the crisis, President Bush refused to declare the funding necessary and did not use \$142 million of the appropriation. In Fiscal Year 2003, Rothman and his colleagues were able to increase spending on VA medical care by \$2.5 billion - \$1 billion more than the President's request.

"The VA's decision to halt enrollment of Priority 8 veterans callously forces many of these veterans to forgo treatment altogether because they cannot afford to pay high premiums for private health insurance or the skyrocketing out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs, while still paying for rent, food, clothing, and other necessities that come with the high cost of living in Northern New Jersey," Rothman said. "It is unconscionable that President Bush could propose a budget that includes a \$726 billion tax cut, over half of which will benefit people earning over \$350,000 a year, yet the Administration cannot find funding the VA needs to assist veterans earning more than \$38,100 a year."

Rothman noted that the Bush Administration is maintaining health care benefits for those Priority 8 veterans who had enrolled in the VA system for health care before the January 16 deadline. He said that the 4,445 New Jersey Priority 8 veterans who did not need care until now should not be penalized for not enrolling sooner.

###

[Go back](#)