

**AUGUST 12, 2005**

**SCHAKOWSKY SPEAKS OUT TO SAVE VETERANS' HEALTH CARE BENEFITS**

**NEW REPORTS SHOWS THOUSANDS OF VETERANS IN 9TH DISTRICT TO LOSE BENEFITS UNDER PRESIDENT'S BUDGET**

**WASHINGTON, DC - The Democratic Staff on the House Government Reform Committee today released a report requested by U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky showing the impact of President Bush's FY06 budget on veterans' health care in the 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Congressional District. The report shows that thousands of veterans in the 9th District would be denied VA health care or VA benefits under President Bush's FY06 budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

**Upon release of the report, Representative Schakowsky remarked: "It is incredibly hypocritical of the President to accuse those who don't support his war in Iraq to the letter and the dollar of not supporting our troops when his own budget denies health care benefits to veterans who have recently returned home from war. Shame on him. First we found out that Illinois ranked last in disability compensation for veterans. Now, if Congress enacts President Bush's proposal, over 3,400 veterans in the 9th Congressional District will be denied VA health care or forced to drop out of the system. This proposal is an unacceptable, and it must be stopped. I will do everything in my power to ensure that access to the VA health care system and its benefits are preserved for all veterans."**

**On February 7, 2005 President Bush proposed a \$28.9 billion budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Four months later -- after receiving criticism from Democrats in Congress and veterans organizations - Bush Administration officials conceded that the President's budget proposal was \$2.6 billion below the level needed to meet the health care needs of veterans. To make up a significant part of the shortfall, the Administration is denying care to hundreds of thousands of veterans, and proposing to charge millions more a \$250 annual enrollment fee while doubling their co-payments for prescription**

drugs.

**This report finds that the proposed changes would cause an estimated 73,000 Illinois veterans, including an estimated 3,400 veterans in Representative Schakowsky's district, to be denied VA health care or to drop out of the VA system, while increasing costs for thousands more. Specifically:**

**. The budget proposals would deny care to over one thousand veterans in the 9th Congressional District. The President's budget would continue to freeze VA enrollment for "Priority 8" veterans, preventing an estimated 21,500 veterans in Illinois from enrolling to receive care. This provision prevents an estimated 1,000 veterans in Rep. Schakowsky's district from enrolling in the VA healthcare system.**

**. The increased fees would force thousands of veterans in Illinois's 9th Congressional District to drop out of the VA health care system. An estimated 51,700 veterans in Illinois would be unable to pay the increased costs for VA health care proposed in the budget, causing them to drop their enrollment in the VA system. An estimated 2,400 veterans in Rep. Schakowsky's district would be forced drop their VA enrollment.**

**. The increased fees would cost veterans in Illinois millions of dollars. Many veterans in Illinois would remain in the VA system but be forced to pay more for their health care. These veterans would face average cost increases of \$390 annually, with some veterans paying as much as \$550 or more. The total additional cost for veterans in Illinois would be \$23.6 million annually. Increased costs for veterans in Representative Schakowsky's district would be \$1.1 million annually.**

**This report comes in the aftermath of Illinois learning it was last among states and territories for disability compensation in 2003. While the Administration has begun to address the disability compensation issues, today's report shows that access to the VA system and its health care benefits is still in question for veterans in the 9th Congressional District and across Illinois.**