

Democrats in Congress continue to champion the cause of veterans across the country. We've seen historic budget increases directed toward caring for our veterans, including an additional \$23 billion devoted to health care and other benefits.

Because of this funding, the Department of Veterans Affairs has already been able to offer care to 193,000 new veterans. VA was also able to hire thousands of new mental health providers, offering the mental health treatment our veterans increasingly require.

We've also seen some great use of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which took effect in August 2009. Since then, veteran students have received \$1.2 billion in education benefits, helping nearly 250,000 individuals. More than 450,000 vets are certified to use this program.

And just a couple weeks ago, VA announced plans to improve care for veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. In the past, veterans went through lengthy investigations to qualify for PTSD benefits. The new rules simplify the process, requiring a VA doctor's diagnosis for veterans who served in a combat zone.

Currently, the House is in the middle of the appropriations process that will fund government agencies for fiscal year 2011. The bill that funds all VA programs throughout the country is one of the main vehicles we have to increase funding for veterans.

In fact, since 2007 Congress has increased VA funding by \$23 billion, or 60 percent. We added an additional 8,300 claims processors to handle the million claims the VA now receives annually. And we provided long-term funding for the new GI Bill, providing \$63 billion over a 10-year period.

This year's funding legislation is just the latest in a long string of bills that fulfill the promise our country made to our veterans: to protect them and take care of them. I'm very proud and thankful for their service.

Finally, I'd like to point out two new websites for veterans in Monterey County. The first, www.help-4-vets.org, is a county website listing many resources for local veterans. The second, www.usiav.org, caters to OEF/OIF veterans living in Monterey County.

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