



Congressman  
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**Committees**

**Energy and Commerce  
Committee**

Energy and Air Quality  
Subcommittee

Telecommunications and  
the Internet Subcommittee

**International Relations  
Committee**

Middle East and Central  
Asia Subcommittee

Europe and Emerging  
Threats Subcommittee



April 2005

Dear Friend:

In March, I voted against the proposed new Federal Budget in part because it failed America's veterans. For veterans, the Budget imposes new health care fees, does not fully fund quality veterans health care, and does not address important issues facing veterans such as the survivors' benefits penalty and the disabled veterans tax.

I joined with veterans groups in supporting an alternative proposal that gave veterans health care and services the funding it needs.

We must make sure that the men and women who have defended our nation receive all the benefits and services they have earned. It is the least we can do for those who have served our country.

**Opposing New Fees for Veterans Health Care**

The Budget I opposed requires middle income veterans to pay a **new annual fee of \$250** just to get any VA health care. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) stated that this will affect 2.2 million veterans.

It also **increases the prescription drug co-pay from \$7 to \$15** for some veterans. In November 2001, the co-pay was \$2. This would mean a 750% increase in prescription drug co-pays for some veterans in less than three and a half years.

According to veterans organizations, these new fees could force at least 220,000 veterans out of the VA health care system.

**Veterans Administration Budget**

The Budget continues to underfund the Veterans Administration (VA) in the face of growing veteran health care needs including those of our older veterans and the Afghanistan and Iraq veterans.

Not including the proposed \$250 enrollment fee and more than doubling the prescription drug co-pay for some veterans, the Budget increases veteran health care funding by only \$111 million. **This is an increase of only four-tenths of one percent (.4%) for veterans' health care.**

It also cuts \$351 million from veterans' nursing homes. This means 28,000 fewer veterans would receive long-term care in nursing homes.

The Budget does not include any increases in death benefits for military service members killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Fully Funded Quality VA Health Care**

I support the proposal of the Independent Budget, a detailed independent VA

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budget that is co-authored each year for the last nineteen years by the AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Their proposal calls for an additional \$3.5 billion to meet realistic inflation and health care demand increases while taking into account the growing needs of older veterans and the new Afghanistan and Iraq veterans. Their proposal does not require any enrollment fees or increase co-pays for prescription drugs.

### **Getting Results for Veterans**

I successfully worked to prevent the closing of the Montrose VA hospital that would have increased overcrowding at the Castle Point and Bronx VA hospitals. I have also obtained additional federal funding for VA facilities including \$3 million dollars for the research center at the Bronx Veterans Medical Center and funds to prevent the VA from closing the Spinal Cord Injury facility at the Bronx VA hospital.

### **End the Survivors' Benefits Penalty**

I have worked to end what has been called the "widows' tax" for veterans' survivors. I am a co-sponsor of legislation to end the "tax" and am working with over 200 other Members of Congress to make this legislation law.

Over one million veterans pay premiums to provide their spouses with an adequate retirement income in the event of their death. They do this in the belief that spouses will receive 55 percent of their retirement benefit. They won't. When spouses reach age 62, the benefit is reduced to only 35 percent. This reduction takes effect even if the survivor is not eligible for Social Security.

This survivors' benefit penalty overwhelmingly affects elderly women and often causes severe economic hardship.

### **Repeal the Disabled Veterans Tax**

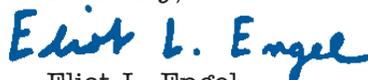
There are over 400,000 disabled veterans. Almost all of these veterans who retire with a service-related disability are not permitted to collect both retirement and disability pay at the same time. These disabled veterans are forced to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. I am working with veterans groups to eliminate the "disabled veterans tax."

I have often said, **"We cannot be a great society if we treat our veterans poorly. We cannot be a great society if we ignore those who have done so much for all of us. We cannot be a great society if we fail those who did not fail us."**

I need your comments and opinions on these critical veterans issues. Please send them to any of my three District Offices or to my Congressional Office in Washington, DC. I look forward to hearing from you.

If you are a veteran or know one who needs assistance in obtaining Veterans Administration benefits please contact any of my District Offices.

Sincerely,



Eliot L. Engel

Member of Congress

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**E-MAIL UPDATES:** You can receive special e-mail issue updates from Congressman Eliot Engel. All you have to do is go to Congressman Engel's website at [www.house.gov/engel](http://www.house.gov/engel) and click on "Sign up for Eliot's E-mail Updates" and complete the form. You can also contact any of Congressman Engel's offices and request to receive the e-mail updates.