

Joins 67 of His Colleagues to Urge the Administration to Reconsider Policy to Bill Veterans' Private Health Insurance Plans for Care and Treatment of Service-Related Injuries

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Ben Ray Luján joined 67 of his colleagues in the House of Representatives to send a letter to President Barack Obama, urging him to reconsider the proposal to require veterans to use their private health insurance plans to pay for care and treatment of service-related injuries. The proposal represents a significant change in policy. Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs pays for treatment of service-related injuries, while veterans' private insurers are responsible for health care costs that are unrelated to their service. Overall, the Obama Administration's budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs is a significant improvement over past budgets. This budget outline proposed a 10 percent increase in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs for next fiscal year and included expanded employment opportunities for veterans. Rep. Glenn Nye of Virginia led the effort to send the letter to President Obama.

"America's soldiers and their families sacrifice for our country every day," said Rep. Luján. "We have a responsibility to provide them with the benefits they have earned and deserve, especially when they are injured in combat. Forcing our soldiers to pay for their own care for injuries they suffered while serving our country is not acceptable. Relying on private insurers to administer care for veterans could endanger care for their family members by raising families' overall medical costs and entangle veterans in a convoluted billing process. We cannot risk care for our injured veterans or their families."

"The Obama Administration has signaled a firm commitment to our veterans by proposing increased funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs and expanded employment opportunities for veterans. It is my hope that they will maintain this commitment by removing the proposal to bill veteran's private health insurers for service-related injuries from the budget."

[VIEW SIGNED VERSION OF THE LETTER](#)

FULL TEXT OF LETTER BELOW:

March 17, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama

President of the United States

The White House

Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President,

We first want to take this opportunity to thank you for the clear commitment your administration's budget outline makes to our nation's veterans. The proposed 10 percent increase in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for next fiscal year is truly historic. We believe the 2010 budget will ensure the VA never again faces the chronic under-funding that prevented countless veterans from receiving the health benefits they have earned.

While we strongly support your plans to increase funding for the VA by \$25 billion over the next five years, it is with equal conviction that we oppose the proposal to bill veterans' private health insurance plans for care and treatment of service-connected injuries or disabilities.

We do not give our veterans health care - they earn it – and it would be unacceptable for the VA to ask our veterans to pay for the treatment of injuries received while serving our nation in uniform. That responsibility belongs to the VA, and it would be wrong to outsource the responsibility of covering the care of those veterans to private insurance companies.

Additionally, this proposal could harm our veterans and their families in unintended, yet very serious ways, jeopardizing their families' health care and even negatively affecting veterans' employment opportunities. Billing a veteran's private health insurance for the treatment of service-connected injuries could lead to increased health care premiums, and could potentially discourage employers from hiring veterans.

We know you are committed to expanding employment opportunities for veterans. Already this year, your administration and Congress have worked to create countless jobs for veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this proposal would undermine our efforts.

We urge you to take this proposal off the table, and let us instead focus on ensuring that our veterans receive the full care and benefits they have earned. The moral obligation our nation has to our veterans demands nothing less. We are happy to discuss these issues with you further as we move toward a final budget for the VA.

We would like to thank you again for your commitment to improving care for the men and women who have borne the battle, and who have sacrificed their health and well-being in serving their country. Thank you for your service to our nation.

Sincerely,

