

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 24, 2009

The Honorable Kent Conrad
Chairman, Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable Judd Gregg
Ranking Member, Senate Budget Committee
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

The Honorable John M. Spratt Jr.
Chairman, House Budget Committee
207 Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515-6065

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Ranking Member, House Budget Committee
B71 Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515-6065

Dear Chairman Conrad, Chairman Spratt, Ranking Member Greg, and Ranking Member Ryan:

As you are aware, on April 9, 2009, President Obama met with members of Veteran Service Organizations and reiterated his support for advance appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care programs. An amendment providing for advance appropriations was included in the Senate's Budget Resolution, but there was no such provision in the House resolution.

In light of President Obama's support for advance appropriations for the VA and because of the importance of timely funding for providing veterans with quality services, we ask that you adopt the Senate position on advance appropriations and include that provision in the conference agreement on the Budget Resolution for fiscal year 2010.

Advance appropriations is a much needed reform in the funding process for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and is a mechanism that will provide timely and predictable resources to the VA. It would provide the VA with an assured source of funding to meet the growing demand for services and adequately maintain operational facilities. We urge you to support advance appropriations for veterans' medical care in the conference committee's consideration of the final FY 2010 Budget Resolution.

Last year, our government was able to enact an on-time budget for VA for the first time in over ten years. Unfortunately, this "timely" budget was approved on September 30, 2008, just one day prior to the start of the next fiscal year. As a direct provider of services, VA operations benefit greatly from advance notice regarding resource allocation. Last-minute funding threatens the quality of care, even when budgets are approved on-time. Late budgets further hinder the ability to recruit well-trained medical professionals, maintain operational facilities, and acquire new equipment. During testimony before the Senate Veteran's Affairs Committee on July 27, 2007, former VA medical center directors stated that most VA budget cycles began via a continuing resolution. As a result, decisions were made on the basis of cost rather than on the basis of the highest quality! treatment.

Providing the VA with advanced appropriations will alleviate many budgeting burdens, ultimately resulting in improved quality of care for veterans and better use of taxpayer dollars. Many have compared this measure to a family budget – a household needs to know its income in advance in order to adequately plan its expenses.

Advance appropriations have already been utilized to meet program recipient funding cycles and promote more efficient operations. Programs that currently have advance appropriations include Head Start, Section 8 housing assistance, Job Corps, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. We must provide the same consideration to the agency dedicated to caring for our nation's most honored heroes.

In order to provide advance appropriations to VA health care, we ask that the conference committee include language in the FY2010 Budget Resolution and provide advance appropriations to the following medical care accounts of the VA – Medical Services, Medical Support and Compliance, and Medical Facilities. By retaining the language in the Senate Budget Resolution authorizing advance appropriations, we can provide a budget for the VA that is timely and meets the needs of our veterans.

We look forward to working with you to begin the process of providing advance appropriations for VA health care in the final FY 2010 Budget Resolution, and by doing so honoring our nation's commitment to the men and women who kept, keep, and will keep this country safe.

Sincerely,



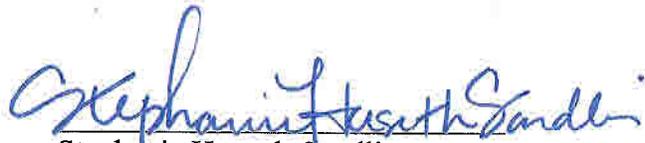
Harry Teague
Member of Congress



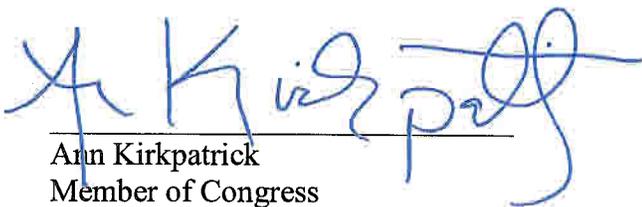
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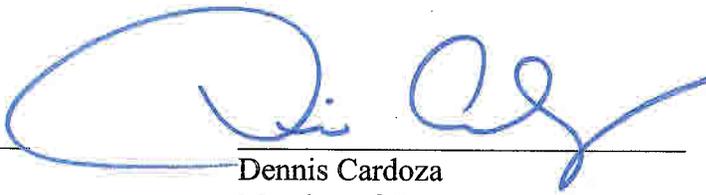
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Gabriele Giffords
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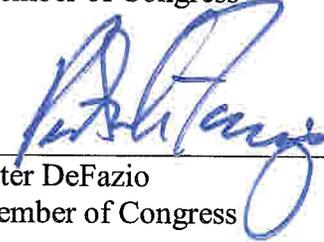
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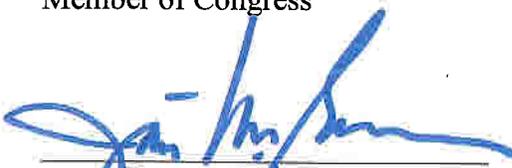
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