

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 1, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
The Honorable Max Baucus
The Honorable John Kerry
The Honorable John Kyl
The Honorable Rob Portman
The Honorable Patrick Toomey

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
The Honorable Dave Camp
The Honorable Fred Upton
The Honorable James Clyburn
The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
The Honorable Xavier Becerra

Dear Members of the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction:

Thank you for representing your colleagues on this critical committee. We applaud your willingness to work in a bipartisan fashion to address the extreme challenge posed by our growing deficit and debt.

Today, over 8 million veterans are enrolled with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and for many veterans trips to VA hospitals and clinics serve as the sole connection to any health care system. As you consider proposals to reduce our deficit, we ask that you maintain level funding for VA health programs to ensure that America will continue its commitment to providing world class care to our veterans.

Achieving the highest quality care starts with full funding of incentive programs that encourage the best medical professionals to pursue careers at the VA, as well as training and retention of staff so that they can effectively process patient records and requests. To sustain this care into the future it will be important to avoid cuts that force physicians and administrators to cut beds, limit appointments and restrict access to critical services like surgery, pharmacology and physical therapy. It is equally important to protect specialized services for women, the elderly and rural veterans, as well as those coping with polytraumatic injury and toxic exposure. Protecting the wide array of VA health services from cuts is critical if we hope to fulfill our obligations to every American veteran.

In Fiscal Year 2010, approximately 1.2 million veterans received care for mental health issues, a number that has grown consistently throughout our engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we redeploy our troops from combat, it is especially important to protect programs that screen for and treat mental health issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. We ask that you maintain funding for psychiatric services, including family, addiction, and suicide prevention counseling.

We recognize as you do that many VA programs are broken. Veterans are often forced to wait far longer than they should for their claims to be processed or their appointments to be scheduled. Many struggle to make sense of the inconsistent disability rating system and other processes guiding access to care and benefits. Clearly, changes need to be made and we agree that inefficiencies in our veterans services must be on the table in your discussions. We simply ask that you avoid making any cuts or changes that will damage the overall level of coverage and quality of service provided by VA facilities, that will increase out of pocket costs, or restrict access to services upon which veterans rely.

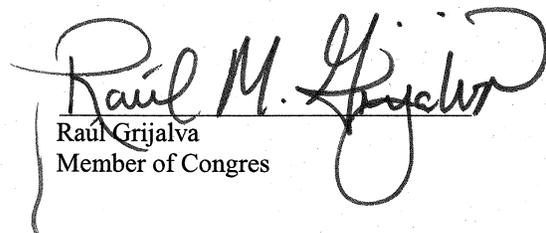
We understand that the task given to you by Congress is far from simple and that all options must be considered. However, we believe you will agree that these goals cannot in good conscience be achieved by sacrificing the health and wellbeing of our nation's veterans. Many brave men and women have sacrificed physically and mentally to protect our great country. We owe all veterans the peace of mind that the health care services they rely on will not be negatively impacted by your decisions.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue and look forward to working with you as you prepare your plan to reduce our nation's deficit and debt.

Sincerely,



André Carson
Member of Congress



Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

Barney Frank

Barney Frank
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Bobby Rush

Bobby Rush
Member of Congress

John Conyers

John Conyers
Member of Congress

Howard L. Berman

Howard Berman
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Jesse Jackson, Jr.

Jesse Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Al Green

Al Green
Member of Congress

Charles S. Rangel

Charlie Rangel
Member of Congress

James McGovern

James McGovern
Member of Congress

Dave Loebsack

Dave Loebsack
Member of Congress

Walter B. Jones

Walter Jones
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Sheila Jackson Lee

Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress

Laura Richardson

Laura Richardson
Member of Congress

Chaka Fattah

Chaka Fattah
Member of Congress

Jim McDermott

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Steve Cohen

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Carolyn M. Maloney

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Luis Gutierrez

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Madeleine J. Bordallo
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Gregorio Sablan
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Member of Congress

Charles A. Gonzalez
Charles Gonzalez
Member of Congress

Pete Stark
Fortney "Pete" Stark
Member of Congress