

**Statement by  
U.S. Representative Tom Allen  
Press Conference to Release Report  
Proposed Restrictions on Access to VA Health Care in Maine  
Maine Veterans' Home  
Bangor, Maine  
April 17, 2003**

WE ARE ALL RELIEVED THAT THE MAJOR MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN IRAQ IS DRAWING TO A CLOSE.

WE ALL REMAIN CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY OF OUR SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN AS THE OPERATION MOVES INTO THE STILL HAZARDOUS PEACEKEEPING AND REBUILDING PHASE.

WE ALL HOPE THAT OUR PARENTS, SIBLINGS, CHILDREN AND NEIGHBORS STATIONED IN THIS TROUBLED REGION WILL SOON BE BACK AMONG US.

LET THERE BE NO DOUBT, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE SUPPORT OUR TROOPS AND ARE PREPARED TO SACRIFICE FOR THEIR WELL-BEING, TODAY AS THEY SERVE AND TOMORROW WHEN THEY COME HOME.

THAT IS WHAT IS ESPECIALLY TROUBLING ABOUT THE REPORT MIKE MICHAUD AND I ARE RELEASING TODAY.

IT REVEALS THAT THE BUDGET PROPOSED BY PRESIDENT BUSH FOR NEXT YEAR WOULD DENY VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HEALTH CARE TO AN ESTIMATED 1,900 MAINE VETERANS AND PLACE AT RISK THE HEALTH CARE BENEFITS 10,000 MAINE VETERANS.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET WOULD INCREASE FEES FOR ALL OF THE 44,000 VETERANS WHO DEPEND UPON TOGUS AND ITS CLINICS AROUND THE STATE.

THE PRESIDENT HAS ORDERED 300,000 SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN INTO BATTLE OVERSEAS, AND, AT THE SAME TIME, PROPOSED TO REDUCE SPENDING ON VETERANS BENEFITS BY \$5.3 BILLION OVER THE NEXT TEN YEARS.

UNDER THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET, SOME VETERANS WOULD PAY, ON AVERAGE, AN ADDITIONAL \$350 A YEAR, INCLUDING A NEW ANNUAL \$250 "ENROLLMENT" FEE, FOR THE HEALTH CARE WE PROMISED TO PROVIDE THEM FOR AS LONG AS THEY LIVE.

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THOSE VETERANS WHO HAVE TURNED TO THE VA FOR HELP BECAUSE THEY CAN'T AFFORD THE SKYROCKETING COST OF THE MEDICINES THEIR DOCTORS PRESCRIBE, COULD FACE NEW FEES OF ALMOST \$600.

OUR STUDY ESTIMATES THAT 7,800 MAINE VETERANS, INCLUDING 2,600 NOW RECEIVING CARE, WILL LIKELY BE UNABLE TO AFFORD THESE FEE INCREASES AND WILL CONSEQUENTLY DROP THEIR VA ENROLLMENT.

MIKE AND I HEAR FROM MAINE VETERANS WHO ARE GRATEFUL TO THE DEDICATED, CARING STAFF AT TOGUS AND THE CLINICS IN CARIBOU, BANGOR, CALAIS, MACHIAS, RUMFORD AND SACO.

HOWEVER, WE HEAR DAILY FROM MANY VETERANS WHO ARE DESPERATE TO RECEIVE THE HEALTH CARE THEY WERE PROMISED.

THEY TELL DISTURBING STORIES OF VETERANS WHO MUST TRAVEL BY BUS TO BOSTON- OFTEN A FIVE DAY TRIP FOR VETERANS FROM NORTHERN MAINE -ONLY TO FIND ONCE THEY ARRIVE THAT THEIR APPOINTMENTS HAVE BEEN CANCELED.

MOST HEART-WRENCHING ARE THE CASES OF VETERANS WHO FINALLY GET AN APPOINTMENT ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THEIR MEDICAL CONDITION HAS DETERIORATED TO THE POINT WHERE THEY ARE BEYOND TREATMENT.

NATIONWIDE LAST YEAR, NEARLY 300,000 VETERANS WERE PLACED ON WAITING LISTS OR FORCED TO WAIT UP TO SIX MONTHS FOR AN APPOINTMENT.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET AND THE EVEN MORE DRACONIAN BUDGET RESOLUTION PASSED BY HOUSE REPUBLICANS WOULD ONLY TAKE THIS OUTRAGEOUS SITUATION FROM BAD TO WORSE.

IT HAS BEEN CONDEMNED BY VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING THE AMERICAN LEGION AND THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS (DAV).

ON MARCH 17<sup>TH</sup>, THE DAV ASKED "IS THERE NO HONOR LEFT IN THE HALLOWED HALLS OF OUR GOVERNMENT THAT YOU CHOOSE TO DISHONOR THE SACRIFICES OF OUR NATION'S HEROES AND ROB OUR PROGRAMS- HEALTH CARE AND DISABILITY

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COMPENSATION -TO PAY FOR TAX CUTS FOR THE WEALTHY?"

AS OUR FIRST TROOPS COME HOME FROM IRAQ AND MORE DEPART TO CONTINUE WHAT MAY BE YEARS OF OPERATIONS IN THE PERSIAN GULF, THIS IS THE WRONG MESSAGE TO SEND THEM.

IN HIS SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS, ABRAHAM LINCOLN PLEDGED "TO CARE FOR HIM WHO SHALL HAVE BORNE THE BATTLE."

BY RELEASING THIS STUDY, MIKE MICHAUD AND I HOPE TO MAKE THE PEOPLE OF MAINE AWARE THAT UNLESS VA FUNDING REDUCTIONS ARE RESTORED, WE WILL BREAK THAT PROMISE TO THOUSANDS OF OUR MAINE VETERANS.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO WORK WITH REPUBLICANS AND DEMOCRATS IN THE HOUSE TO PROTECT THE HEALTH CARE BENEFITS THAT MAINE AND AMERICA'S VETERANS HAVE EARNED THROUGH THEIR SERVICE ON OUR BEHALF.