



The 2003 Veterans' Update

Bringing Stability to Iraq

Since 9/11, the United States has been a nation at war. Iraq has emerged as the central front in the war on terror, and our forces, as well as Coalition and Iraqi forces, have worked diligently towards a lasting security for the people of these countries, as well as humanity worldwide.

It has become evident that failure to eradicate these threats leaves us vulnerable to future acts of terrorism. The U.S. and Coalition partners have been successful in removing the governments who support terror and terrorist tactics, and it is now critical to ensure the people of Iraq establish a nation that no longer serves as an incubator for terrorism, but rather a source for peace and progress. The seeds of democracy are taking root and the Iraqi people are moving closer towards a self-government that can help bring peace and stability to one of the world's most volatile regions.

In this last year, the world has watched closely as the Iraqi people move towards a more democratic and peaceful nation. We have witnessed many events that demonstrate Iraq is on a progressive road, most recently evident in the recent capture of Saddam Hussein. We have also seen many accomplishments at the government, economic and social levels of Iraq society, including:

- A governing council that runs the day to day operations of the Iraq government, municipal councils in all major cities and 85 percent of towns, a Transitional Assembly assuming full power in 2004, to be followed by democratic elections and a formal Constitution being written. When this is done full sovereignty will be given to the Iraqi people.

- Iraqi children are now attending a modernized educational system, which includes the renovation of schools, 72 million new textbooks this year, over 1 million school kits with essential schools supplies, 64,000 secondary teachers, and scholarship programs. In fact, nearly all Iraqi children have finished their exams from last year and are ready to start a new school year in the fall.

- The new Iraqi economy is being built on the principles of market economies. They are enjoying increased private businesses, job programs being created, funding for micro and small businesses, and a unified currency the Iraqi Dinar (ID), which has maintained its value against the dollar.

- Iraqis are enjoying a dramatically improved healthcare system, with more than half of all Iraq children under 5 having vaccinations, and 20,000 more receiving required vaccinations each month. Under Saddam Hussein, healthcare was available only for Ba'athist elite, but is now available to all Iraqis.

Our enemies are closely monitoring our actions in Iraq. They are hopeful that we will waiver; that we will cut and run. They would most certainly seize on such an opportunity, and the safety and well-being of our troops should not be the rope in a political tug-of-war. We must finish the job we started to ensure that the terrorists of the world cannot attack our nation or its people again.

Outside observers and coalition leaders agree that much remains to be done to restore order and bring prosperity to a brutalized society and an infrastructure suffering from decades of malign neglect. The steps toward sovereignty and democracy will be difficult and require patience and time. Substantial progress is being made on all fronts. As President Bush recently said, "the success of a free Iraq will ... demonstrate to other countries in that region that national prosperity and dignity are found in representative government and free institutions.... As freedom advances in the Middle East, those societies will be less likely to produce ideologies of hatred and produce recruits for terror." As we continue to fight terrorism, the movement toward a free and peaceful Iraq continues to grow, and this transformation is providing all of us a safer, more secure nation and world.



Newly Expanded Tricare Program

Because of the large number of reservists who have fought in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the United States, Congress considered a number of ways to expand current benefits and approved a demonstration project to provide access to DOD's TRICARE health care system to certain non-deployed reservists in the FY2004 Department of Defense Authorization Act.

Under current law and DOD policy, reservists become eligible for TRICARE once they are on active duty. The Defense Authorization Act, which I supported, offers access to TRICARE to unemployed and non-deployed reservists who receive unemployment

compensation or who are not eligible for coverage offered by an employer. It maintains current higher levels of imminent danger pay and family separation allowance for eligible military personnel through December 2004. Reservists would be required to pay a premium set at 28% of the value of the actuarial cost of the plan as is currently required for civilian employees in the government's Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) insurance plan.

To learn more about this benefit, please visit <http://www.tricare.osd.mil> or call TRICARE's toll free at 1-800-444-5445.



**Congressman
Adam H. Putnam**

Important Information & Resources

For help in filling out forms, including compensation claims, widow's claims, burial claims or aid and attendance benefits, please contact:

Hillsborough County Veterans Service Office: 813-975-2181

Osceola County Veterans Service Office:
407-932-5150

Polk County Veterans Service Office:
863-534-5220

St. Petersburg Regional Office:
800-827-1000

For help regarding compensation claims, widow's claims, aid and attendance benefits, burial claims, home loans, vocational rehabilitation. All forms are available at www.va.gov or by calling 800-827-1000.

James A. Haley VA Medical Center:
813-903-4815 or toll free 888-716-7787

For help with all healthcare issues, including medical equipment needs

Orlando VA Healthcare Center:
800-922-7521

For help with all healthcare issues, including medical equipment needs

For additional help, please contact my office in Florida at 863-534-3530

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www.adamputnam.house.gov**

CONTACT INFORMATION

Washington

506 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
p. 202-225-1252

Florida

650 East Davidson Street
Bartow, FL 33830
p. 863-534-3530

www.adamputnam.house.gov

Providing Concurrent Receipt

For more than 100 years, military retirees have been prohibited from receiving their full retirement pay when they were also in receipt of VA disability compensation payments. Under the Department of Defense Authorization legislation that recently passed Congress and was signed into law by the President, the prohibition on concurrent receipt of disability compensation and military retirement pay will be phased out for every disabled veteran wounded in combat or incurring combat related injuries, including National Guard and reserve members, and every veteran whose disabilities are rated 50% or greater.

This bill, which has the support of our nation's service organizations, will result in more than **\$22 billion** going directly into the pockets of hundreds of thousands of military retirees who were injured or made ill as a result of their service. For a 100% disabled veteran eligible with a military retirement pension, this could mean as much as \$167,000 in additional benefits over the next ten years.

The new law provides concurrent receipt for many veterans:

Purple Heart - continues to provide full concurrent receipt to all purple heart veterans who are retired after 20 years and who have a VA

disability rating between 10% and 100%.

Combat-Related Special Compensation - Under current law, combat-related special compensation (CRSC) veterans 60% disabled and above have full concurrent receipt through the Purple Heart Plus plan for disabilities related to combat situations. The new law expands full concurrent receipt to all CRSC veterans with a VA disability rating of 10% - 100%.

National Guard and Reservists - Very few retired reservists and national guardsmen now qualify under current law for the Purple Heart or CRSC concurrent receipt. The new law removes this barrier and extends full concurrent receipt to all retired national guard and reservists (10 - 100% disabled) who are Purple Heart recipients or who are CRSC qualified.

Remaining Military Retirees - Under current law, none of the remaining military retirees receive concurrent receipt. The new law establishes full concurrent receipt to the most disabled military retirees 50% disabled and above (50 - 100% disabled).

I am pleased that Congress has taken this important step to provide concurrent receipt for our nation's veterans. Under this plan, those veterans that need help the most will receive it.

**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

M.C.

COMMITTEES

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