United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 14, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge you to give appropriate attention and priority to the needs of our nation's veterans in the Fiscal Year 2006 budget proposal you will soon be submitting to Congress.

The ongoing conflicts abroad necessitate that our country maintain well-trained, healthy, and disciplined armed forces. However, we should be mindful at all times that we must remain committed to the care of these men and women upon their return and separation from military service. Fulfillment of this obligation requires constant vigilance on the part of Congress as well as the Executive Branch.

As in years past, we plan to move forward in a bipartisan manner to provide adequate funding for the VA health care system. Merely covering payroll increases for VA health care personnel and medical inflation is not sufficient. Last year, Congress added $1.2 billion in funding for VA medical care to the Omnibus Appropriations Bill for 2005. With tens of thousands of servicemembers deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of whom will return home this year, each of us has a responsibility to ensure that the VA health care system receives full appropriated funding -- without reliance on increasing out-of-pocket fees to veterans.

It is imperative that VA is able to provide high-quality primary and specialty care in a timely manner, in addition to long-term and mental health care for those who require it. It is already apparent that both of these services will continue to be in high demand and we cannot ignore them as we shape the future of VA health care. We all have an obligation to the men and women who serve our nation to ensure that VA gets the funding it so desperately needs to meet these goals.

We sincerely hope that your budget will be a clear message to the heroes of our conflicts – past and present – that their sacrifices are not forgotten. Your support will go a long way in keeping the promises we have made to our nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

Daniel K. Akaka

Carl Levin

Kent Conrad

Patty Murray

Bill Nelson

Byron L. Dorgan

John D. Rockefeller IV

Richard J. Durbin

Benjamin E. Nelson

Tim Johnson

Frank Lautenberg

Jack Reed

Hillary Rodham Clinton

James M. Jeffords

Charles E. Schumer

Jeff Bingaman

Debbie Stabenow

Christopher J. Dodd

Mark Dayton

Barack Obama

Patrick J. Leahy

Harry Reid

Mary L. Landrieu

Edward M. Kennedy

Maria Cantwell

John F. Kerry

Blanche L. Lincoln

Paul S. Sarbanes

Barbara A. Mikulski

Mark Pryor

Max Baucus

Ken Salazar

Tom Harkin