



November 10, 2006

Dear Friends:

Saturday, November 11th, is a special day to honor America's veterans. Veterans Day reminds all Americans that the costs of war do not end when our troops come home from the battlefield. Nobody understands these costs more than American troops who are engaged in hostilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world. More than 2,800 American service members have been killed in Iraq and 21,200 troops have been wounded, many of them permanently, and more than 300 have been killed in Afghanistan. Our troops are serving our nation with honor and distinction and will become the veterans of tomorrow. They deserve our gratitude – and the support they were promised.

I believe it is our moral obligation to support those who have fought for freedom and democracy. My fellow Democrats and I introduced a comprehensive New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century. In each major military conflict since World War II, our nation has honored our service members and veterans through a GI bill to provide returning troops with educational benefits, loans to buy a home and medical assistance. Our New GI Bill will strengthen benefits for our men and women in uniform today, and provide more responsive benefits for many who have already served.

Honoring our commitments to our nation's veterans begins with repealing the Disabled Veterans' Tax and adequately funding veterans' health care. The Disabled Veterans' Tax is forcing military retirees with service-connected disabilities to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. Democrats in Congress have succeeded in getting a partial repeal, but the remaining 400,000 disabled military retirees deserve permanent relief from this unfair tax.

For those returning from the front lines, Democrats will continue our efforts to fight to adequately invest in veterans' health care. Our New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century aims to improve veterans' health care, including mental health care, to meet the needs of our returning troops.

Unfortunately, veterans face costly obstacles obtaining the quality health care they were promised. President Bush has proposed doubling pharmacy co-pays for military families. Since January 2003, the Bush administration has denied more than 270,000 veterans from the VA health care system. Rather than adequately invest in veterans health care, the president and his party in Congress have cut \$6 billion from these services, even as nearly 185,000 returning troops from Iraq and Afghanistan have now sought health care with the VA. Under these policies, this health care crisis will get worse as service members return from Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2006 alone, the Department expects to treat 5.2 million veterans – double the number in 1995.

Democrats are fighting to meet the demand for veterans' services. As the result of our efforts, last summer, Republicans were forced to acknowledge that funding for veterans' health was nearly \$3

billion short. In addition, Democrats have led the fight and succeeded in providing full access to TRICARE – the military health program – to all members of the Guard and Reserve and their families for a low premium.

Democrats have a plan for a new direction for America that honors our veterans' service with a New GI Bill of Rights worthy of our grateful nation. Our troops, veterans and the families of those who have given their lives in defense of our country deserve the gratitude, respect and support of the American people and their government.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we will leave no veteran behind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Betty", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum  
Serving Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District

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