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

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Dear Friends:

It was my hope to be with you today to personally update you on legislative efforts on behalf of West Virginia's Veterans. The House of Representatives, however, has -- since the planning of this event -- scheduled session for today. It is, therefore, my reluctant pleasure to send my representative to join you and to brief you on congressional efforts up to date in my stead.

Most recently the U.S. Senate passed an omnibus veterans bill which will affect more than 60 VA run programs. In part, H.R. 2616, as passed by the Senate on December 4th: includes new benefit payments to veterans who were exposed to radiation during nuclear-weapons tests and the U.S. occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, following World War II; encourages health-care professionals to stay at VA facilities through bonuses and other incentives; requires the VA to contract for a scientific review of the health effects of the herbicide "Agent Orange" and report to Congress by next October; allows former prisoners of war to claim additional diseases as service connected for the purposes of collecting compensation; and, provides a 4.2 percent cost-of-living adjustment for compensation benefits which would be extended also to surviving spouses, parents and children of deceased veterans, who now receive VA benefits. This bill which passed the House in a much less comprehensive form, must now go to a House-Senate conference where the differences in the House and Senate passed measures must be worked out.

Another bill which faces a House-Senate conference is H.R. 2327. This bill, which also originated in the House of Representatives, would amend the U.S. Code to ensure eligibility of certain individuals for beneficiary travel benefits when traveling to VA medical facilities. As a cosponsor of H.R. 2327, I was pleased by the House passage in June and Senate passage in October and will continue to follow this measure's progress.

Among those bills which have passed the House, but have not yet been passed by the Senate, are: H.R. 1504, the Veterans' Employment and Education Amendments of 1987 which authorizes programs under the Veterans' Job Training Act; H.R. 3471, which establishes the Veterans Administration as an executive department thus elevating veteran concerns to cabinet level; H.R. 1811, the Atomic Veterans Compensation Act of 1987, which provides certain benefits to veterans and survivors of veterans who participated in atmospheric nuclear tests or the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and who suffer from diseases that may be attributable to low levels of ionizing



radiation; H.R. 2672, the Veterans' Housing Rehabilitation and Program Improvement Act of 1987, which improves veterans' housing programs; H.R. 2945, the Veterans' Compensation Amendments of 1987, which provides a COLA to veterans and dependents receiving compensation benefits; H.R. 3449, a bill to improve health care programs of the VA; and, H.R. 3460, the Veterans' Employment and Training Act of 1987. While a number of these bills have been incorporated by the Senate -- in whole or in part -- into H.R. 2616, these bills have not been acted on separately by the Senate. Many of these issues may, however, come under discussion during the House-Senate conference on H.R. 2616.

Of particular interest to West Virginia's veterans, both the Senate and House have passed appropriations bills which make recommendations with regard to specific VA medical facilities in our State. As you may know, the VA 5-year plan includes a funding level of \$15.7 million for the Beckley VA Medical Center (VAMC) clinical addition. Under the VA's plan, this funding would begin in fiscal year 1989. The Senate passed HUD and Independent Agencies Appropriations bill includes a recommendation that the VA accelerate this project and incorporate it into the earliest possible President's budget request. Hopefully, this language will be retained in the final appropriations bill and will accelerate this funding to begin in fiscal year 1988.

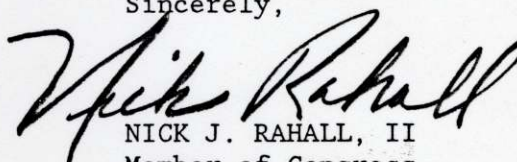
Also of concern, both the House and Senate have included the funding necessary to complete the clinical addition at the Huntington VA Medical Center in their respective appropriations bills. The \$43.4 million needed for this project was included in the President's fiscal year 1988 budget request and was incorporated into both the House and Senate passed appropriations measures. I testified before both the House authorization and appropriations subcommittees in this regard and look forward to making the same effort to request the funds needed for the Beckley VA Medical Center Clinical Addition in the next legislative session.

You may be assured of my continued support of these and other efforts designed to continue and improve veterans benefits. During these last days of the first session of the 100th Congress, funding levels for veterans programs in fiscal year 1988 -- and in fact for all federal programs -- will be decided. Please know that I will vote on the final funding measures with our shared concerns in mind.

Again, while I could not be with you personally, it was my pleasure to address you today via my staff representative. As in the past, if ever I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to call on me.

With warm regards to all, I am

Sincerely,

  
NICK J. RAHALL, II  
Member of Congress

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