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RAHALL BLASTS VETERANS CRITICS

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Congressman Nick J. Rahall, II (D-WV) today blasted the General Accounting Office's report stating that one-fifth of the disability benefits paid to Veterans are for the "ordinary" diseases of life that have nothing to do with veterans' military service.

"There is a current of thought in medical circles that although a person may not have suffered debilitating physical injury during their service to our nation, the mental and emotional stress caused by killing other humans, or trying to live long enough to return to the U.S., can create long-lasting mental scars that may eventually lead to physical illness," said Rahall.

Rahall also mentioned that he disagreed with the report's attempt to create categorical differences between Vietnam Veterans and Veterans of the Second World War, and added that he did not care to imagine the day when we shall remove millions of Veterans from VA benefits programs and add them to the 37 million Americans who are already without any kind of health care coverage.

"We cannot and should not decide who gets what health care benefits; they all deserve them," emphasized Rahall. "We owe our Veterans a debt, and by accusing them of fraudulently claiming their right to health care, the GAO report has wrongfully dismissed the U.S. Veteran's position of importance earned through proud service to this nation."

[I rise in strong opposition to the recently released GAO report stating that one fifth of the disability benefits paid to Veterans are for the "ordinary" diseases of life that have nothing to do with Veterans' military service.]

There is a current of thought in medical circles that although a person may not have suffered debilitating physical injury during their service to our nation, the mental and emotional stress caused by killing other humans, or merely trying to live long enough to return to the U.S., can create long-lasting mental scars. This extreme anguish, which no one can possibly imagine unless they have lived through a war, can eventually lead to physical illness as the Veteran ages, and most of our World War II and Korean War Veterans have aged considerably since their service to our country. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that Vietnam Veterans have suffered from indescribable mental anguish, which has hindered their careers and made it difficult for them to care for themselves and their families. This certainly is service-related injury, although there are some who would question the validity of this claim, and continue to deny the Veteran his fair share of the benefits earned in defense of our country.

In addition, I cannot and do not care to imagine the day when we shall remove millions of Veterans from VA benefits programs and add them to the 37 million Americans who are already without any kind of health care coverage. Is it for us to decide that a Veteran can only receive VA benefits if he or she was injured in battle only? Who would benefit from such a situation, certainly not the Federal Government which is already buckling under the stress of providing health care under existing programs.

I am also deeply offended at the report's attempt to create a rift
between Vietnam and World War II era Veterans. We ^{can}~~are~~ not and should not

decide who gets health care benefits; they all deserve them. Even more ridiculous is the GAO report's quoting of David Stockman, who has already proven his credibility as a budget expert -- he has none.

In conclusion, I would like to restate my adamant opposition to any effort to cut the Veterans out of their own benefits programs and pit them against other Americans who also need health care security. We owe our Veterans a debt, and by accusing them of fraudulently claiming their rights to health care, the GAO report has wrongfully dismissed the U.S. Veteran's position of importance earned through proud service to this nation.

I would not want to experience the physical and mental torment that our Veterans have endured, and no one has the right to deny their rights to health care, whatever the reason.