



Santa Clara County
DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The Democratic Party: Fighting for Veterans and Their Families

"I come here today to propose a Military Family Bill of Rights - real and specific guarantees - that will keep faith with those who served and the families who share in their sacrifice."

— [Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry](#)

Since moving into the White House, Bush and his administration have betrayed America's longstanding promises to veterans and their families. From gutting funding for veterans' healthcare or sending troops to the War in Iraq with antiquated flak jackets, the Bush administration fails to honor our veterans. Republican leadership has stopped Democratic efforts to provide full funding for veterans and their families. A Kerry administration will fight for and implement a new compact with America's veterans.

"My administration understands America's obligations not only go to those who wear the uniform today, but to those who wore the uniform in the past: to our veterans."

George W. Bush

[Remarks to Veterans of Foreign Wars](#)

August 20, 2001

That's what Bush SAYS . . . it's NOT what he DOES

- Bush Betrays Sacred Trust To Provide For Military and Veterans
- What Veterans Say About Bush's Budget
- Democrats Provide What Veterans Need
- John Kerry's Plan: Fighting for America's Veterans

"We have a sacred obligation to do our part for those who have borne the burdens of battle. This is about the character of our nation and who we are as a people; it is about keeping America's promise, about love of country, and the debt we owe to those who defend it."

Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry

[John Kerry Lays Out Vision for Strong Military](#)

[Sends Our Troops to Iraq with Antiquated, Substandard Flak Jackets](#)

“Parents were buying flak jackets and sending them to sons and daughters in Iraq because soldiers were using outdated vests. To this day, thousands of men and women still don't have Interceptor vests, a high-tech model that has saved the lives of soldiers shot in the chest with AK-47 bullets.” [“Troops Pay Price As Military Skimps” [Los Angeles Times](#) 12/7/03]

“Many of our troops are listening tonight. And I want you and your families to know...my administration, and this Congress, will give you the resources you need to fight and win the war on terror.”

— **George W. Bush**
[State of the Union Address 1/21/04](#)

“It's shocking,’ says George Washington Law School Professor Jonathan Turley, who exposed the shortage of high-grade flak jackets more than two months ago in an [October] opinion piece for The [Los Angeles] Times. Since then, Turley has been under siege, having lost count of the number of private citizens offering money for the purchase of vests the military has failed to provide.” [“Troops Pay Price As Military Skimps” [Los Angeles Times](#) 12/7/03]

[Tried to Cut Combat Pay for Troops in Iraq and Afghanistan](#)

Bush's White House tried to cut the combat pay of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan but had to backpedal due to public outrage. “The Pentagon's support for the idea of rolling back “imminent danger pay” by \$75 a month and ‘family separation allowances’ for the American forces by \$150 a month collapsed after a story in *The Chronicle* Thursday generated intense criticism from military families, veterans groups and Democratic candidates seeking to unseat President Bush in 2004.” [“Troops in danger zone no longer face pay cut” [San Francisco Chronicle](#) 8/15/03]

[Proposed Closing VA Hospitals](#)

“The [Bush Administration's] proposed \$4.6 billion restructuring would shutter hospitals in Canandaigua; Pittsburgh; Lexington, Ky.; Brecksville, Ohio; Gulfport, Miss.; Livermore, Calif.; and Waco, Texas. It would also downsize another dozen health centers around the country.” [“Proposed shutdown of VA hospitals sparks protests” [Associated Press/ Army Times](#) October 28, 2003]

“What message does it send to our veterans when the Administration says American taxpayers can afford to build new hospitals in Iraq, but we cannot afford to keep open veterans hospitals here at home?”

Congressman Chet Edwards (D-TX)
[Keeping our Promises to America's Veterans](#)

[Poses for Military Photo Ops While Sick, Wounded Troops Wait Months for Medical Care](#)

While President Bush has photo ops at Walter Reed Hospital, “[h]undreds of sick and wounded U.S. soldiers including many who served in the Iraq war are languishing in hot cement barracks here while they wait—sometimes for months—to see doctors.” [“Sick, wounded U.S. troops held in squalor” [UPI](#) 10/17/03]

[Opposed Health Insurance for National Guard and Reserves](#)

“The Bush Administration formally opposed giving members of the National Guard and Reserves access to the U.S. military's health insurance system. ... A recent General Accounting Office report estimated that one out of five Guard members has no health insurance.” [“Health plan for Guard opposed” [Gannett News Service /The Olypian](#) 10/23/03]

[Opposed \\$1.3 Billion for Veterans Emergency Health Care Funding.](#)

The Bush Administration actively opposed \$1.3 billion in funding for emergency health care funding for veterans in the 2004 budget. (It passed over the president's objections.) Steve Robertson, legislative director for the American Legion said “Democrats have ... supported the veterans' concerned at a much louder rate than Republicans.” [Democrats fight for veterans' votes, [Detroit News](#), 12/27/03]

“Many veterans have observed that the government seemed to work a lot more efficiently when it wanted something from them. When the Draft Board got your file, it worked efficiently. (Laughter.) But now, when you need health care, forms get lost and answers come late. That is no way to treat America's veterans, and that is going to change.”

George W. Bush

[Remarks to Veterans of Foreign Wars](#)

August 20, 2001

[Proposed Cutting Veterans Lifetime Healthcare Benefits.](#)

Bush proposed reducing veterans' guaranteed lifetime healthcare benefits to two years only. Moreover, Bush's proposed increasing out-of-pocket costs of co-payments for outpatient care and prescription drugs and included a \$250 yearly enrollment fee. ["Veterans' care squeezed by VA" [Cincinnati Enquirer](#), 5/25/03]

[Proposed Tripling What Veterans Pay For Drug Benefits.](#)

“[R]etirees may be asked to pay \$10 – up from the current \$3 – for each 90-day generic prescription filled by mail through Tricare, the military's health insurance program. Tricare's current \$9 co-pay for a three-month supply of each brand-name drug would jump to \$20. The proposal also would impose charges for drugs the retirees now receive free at military hospitals and clinics. There would be a \$10 fee for each generic prescription and a \$20 charge for brand name drugs dispensed at those facilities.” [“Drug fees for military retirees may be raised” [Virginia Pilot](#), 1/1/03]

[Threatened to Veto 2003 Defense Authorization Bill if it Included New Benefits for Disabled Military Retirees.](#)

“Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.)...said ... that overwhelming majorities in both houses passed a version of the 'concurrent receipt' provision out of basic fairness. Disabled veterans should be able to receive military retirement benefits and VA disability benefits without an offset, he said, because retirement pay is for length of service and disability compensation is for pain and suffering incurred in uniform.”

“The pension provision would for the first time allow military retirees to collect retirement benefits from the Pentagon and disability benefits from the Veterans Administration at the same time. Proponents call this 'concurrent receipt.'”

(Veterans who are 60% or more disabled qualify for disability, but their military pensions are cut dollar for dollar for any disability payment they receive. Concurrent receipt means the injured veterans would be allowed to keep their pensions in addition to any disability payment, just as other government workers are allowed to do.) [“Bush threatens veto of defense bill” [Washington Post](#), 10/7/02]

[Denying Money Awarded to Tortured Desert Storm Prisoners -- Wants Money for Tortured Vets to Fund Reconstruction Contracts.](#)

“The Bush administration is seeking to block a group of American troops who were tortured in Iraqi prisons during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 from collecting any of the hundreds of millions of dollars in frozen Iraqi assets that they won last summer in a federal court ruling against the government of Saddam Hussein.”

The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported “In a sworn court filing in the case for the former prisoners, Paul Bremer, the American administrator in Iraq, said the money won by the former prisoners had already been "completely obligated or expended" in reconstruction efforts. These funds are critical to maintaining peace and stability in Iraq.” [“U.S. fights GIs' award for Iraqi torture; frozen funds intended for rebuilding” [San Francisco Chronicle](#) 11/10/03]

What Veterans Say About Bush's Budget.

[The Disabled American Veterans Organization](#)

"It is clear that veterans are not a national priority to this administration, and the President's budget plan attempts to shift the burden for funding veterans health care to those brave men and women who have served and sacrificed for our country. It is utterly disgraceful to shortchange America's veterans at a time when this government has placed so many of our troops in harm's way in the war on terror, considering that many of them will need VA medical care for decades to come." (February 4, 2004)

[Vietnam Veterans of America](#)

"The budget proposed by the President for veterans health care for the next fiscal year is not only inadequate, it's an insult to veterans. It represents a clear-cut case of misplaced priorities. The same budget that calls for generous funding to wage war ignores the real needs of those who return from the war zone, and will impose undue hardship on them." (February 4, 2004)

[Fact Sheets for House Consideration of the 2005 Budget [House Budget Committee Democratic Caucus](#) March 23, 2004]

"I come here every day. It's better than any other VA hospital I've been to. I went through a lot ... and the only thing I wanted to know was that they were going to care for me when I came home."

Thomas Greene, 52,
disabled Army Ranger
Two Tours in Vietnam

[*"Proposed shutdown of VA hospitals sparks protests"* [Associated Press/ Army Times](#) October 28, 2003]



World War II veterans Joe Burton, of Monroeville (left), and Fred Flate, of Washington County, listen to a speaker Saturday at a rally to protest the VA's decision to close the Highland Drive VA hospital at the facility in East Liberty.

James Knox/Tribune-Review

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[*"Veterans fight hospital closing"* [Pittsburg Tribune-Review](#) September 7, 2004]



John Wallace, a veteran and 28-year employee of the Oakland VA hospital, bows his head during the opening prayer at a rally to protest the planned closure of the Highland Drive VA hospital. James Knox/Tribune-Review

[“Veterans fight hospital closing” [Pittsburg Tribune-Review](#) September 7, 2004]

[Democrats Fight For America's Veterans](#)

"While the President is praising troops in one breath, his Administration tries to cut their combat pay in another. While heralding veterans, the Republicans in Congress shortchange veterans' health care by \$1.8 billion. While Republicans pretend to oppose the tax on disabled veterans, they refuse to join Democrats in repealing it. No eligible veteran should be excluded, and all should have this unreasonable tax lifted. The men and women who are serving or have served their country deserve no less."

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi (CA)

[Office of House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi](#)

[Democrats Fight for Veterans Health Care](#)

Senator Bob Graham (D-FL) sponsored the law that allows Congress to review for 60 days the Secretary of Veterans Affairs recommendation on the hospital closing recommendations. The 60-day review period will begin after Principi makes his decision on the CARES recommendations. Democratic Senator Bob Graham to pass this important bill in November 2003. Of the nine Senatorial co-sponsors, eight were Democrats. [*"Bill Summary & Status for the 108th Congress"* [S.1283](#)]

[Congressman Gene Taylor \(D-MS\): Don't Close! Create VA Teaching Hospital on Gulf Coast](#)

Congressman Taylor's proposes turning a VA hospital into a teaching school. His proposal fits the pattern of his staunch opposition to closing any military bases or reducing services for veterans in South Mississippi.

"In a Veterans Day speech, Taylor, D-Miss., suggested that creating a University of Southern Mississippi teaching school would keep the 92-acre campus open. The Gulfport veterans hospital is one of five divisions of the VA Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System, which stretches from Gulfport to Panama City, Fla. "[T]he Gulfport hospital already hosts medical residency programs for Tulane University and the University of South Alabama."

The Gulfport unit houses 125 patients in a psychiatric unit and has a 56-bed dementia unit. The state's only medical school is at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson [which is four hours north of the Mississippi Gulf Coast]. ["Rep. Taylor proposes USM teaching hospital on coast" [The Sun-Herald](#) November 2, 2003]

[Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton: VA Hospital Plan 'Deeply Flawed'](#)

"I believe that the Draft National CARES Plan and the process used to develop it are deeply flawed. The Plan has not adequately taken into account the impact of these proposals on long term care, domiciliary care and mental health services. Moreover, this Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs have not allowed veterans a meaningful opportunity to participate in the overall CARES process. The Department of Veterans Affairs needs to go back to the drawing board and develop its plan through a fair process that takes into account all relevant factors and allows veterans to fully participate in the plan's development." ["Senator Clinton Testifies Before VA Cares Commission to Oppose Closure of Canandaigua VA Hospital" [Office of Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) October 20, 2003]

Democrats Provide What Veterans Need

The Democratic budget provides \$1.3 billion more than the Republican budget for veterans programs for 2005 and \$6.6 billion more over five years. Though House Republicans may tout the fact that their budget contains more veterans appropriations than the President's budget, the Republican budget still provides \$1.3 billion less than what the Veterans' Affairs Committee recommended — on a bipartisan basis — for these vital veterans health care programs.

Committee on Veterans Affairs

The Committee on Veterans Affairs — on a bipartisan basis -- recommended \$2.5 billion more than what the Bush budget provided for maintaining maintain vital veteran health care programs. Nevertheless, the House Republican budget provides \$1.3 billion less than what the Committee recommends for 2005. The Democratic budget provides the full Committee-recommended level of \$32.3 billion for 2005 AND includes \$6.6 billion more than the Republican budget over the next five years.

The Democratic budget

- improves access and reduces waiting time for all veterans
- meets statutory requirements for long-term care by increasing the current number of nursing home beds to 1998 levels
- reduces or eliminates the increased co-payments (\$135 million) and enrollment fees (\$268 million) proposed in the Bush budget
- increases funds for medical facility construction and renovation and provides necessary resources for responsive reviews of claims and appeals.

Bush Budget Endangers Veterans' Health Care

Failure to match the recommendation of the Committee on Veterans Affairs will make it very difficult for the VA to meet the cost increases of expected changes in health care utilization of its enrollees, or to meet current payroll, inflation and non-discretionary workload adjustments. This could be the difference between treating 170,000 unique veterans, or, alternatively, paying the salaries of 13,000 VA staff needed to treat veterans. [Fact Sheets for House Consideration of the 2005 Budget [House Budget Committee Democratic Caucus](#) March 23, 2004]

John Kerry's Plan: Fighting for America's Veterans

John Kerry's Plan to Restore American Security and Pearl Harbor Day

Enhancing Intelligence, Improving Port Security

On September 11, 2001, America was again struck by a surprise attack from a hidden enemy, and again we paid a terrible price. This time, however, the President's response was very different. Where President Roosevelt sought answers, President Bush has sought to avoid blame, repeatedly stonewalling the 9/11 Commission and Congressional efforts to understand intelligence mistakes leading up to September 11th. The Bush Administration has not even completed the National Intelligence Review mandated at the beginning of the Administration. Nor has the Bush Administration taken the necessary steps to improve homeland security by making our ports safer. ➤ [Read the Full Plan](#)

John Kerry's Priorities for Veterans and Their Families

A New Compact with America's Veterans

This nation made a sacred covenant with those it drafted and those who enlisted, but the truth is that every day in America the treatment of too many veterans is breaking that covenant. For John Kerry, the fight continues. He will deliver health care and prescription drugs veterans need. He will grant full concurrent receipt to disabled veterans and fairly compensate soldiers and their families for their valiant service. This is about keeping America's promise, it is about national obligation -- and, it is about love of country and the help and honor we owe to those who defend it.

Mandatory Funding of Veterans Health Care

The Bush Administration chronically under-funds VA health care. Nearly 90,000 veterans are waiting for healthcare appointments. Instead of adding sufficient resources to the VA system, President Bush has frozen whole classes out of it. By the Bush Administration's own estimate, their policies will exclude approximately 500,000 veterans from the VA healthcare system by 2005. President Bush also proposed increasing fees and co-payments in an effort to shift the burden for care onto the backs of veterans, dropping an additional million veteran from VA health care. John Kerry will stop playing politics with veterans health care funding. He insists on mandatory funding for veterans health care. With President Kerry, veterans will get the appointments they need with VA doctors and the federal government will ensure no veteran's health care need is unmet.

Not Overstretching the Military

George Bush Has overstretched the U.S. Military. The Bush administration compensates by using the National Guard and Reserve. Reservists are overburdened and may leave the military in large numbers.

John Kerry will reduce the strain on the military. He calls for a temporary increase of about 40,000 active-duty Army troops. About 20,000 of the troops will be in specialties such as military police and civil affairs, currently and predominantly found in the Reserves. The other 20,000 would be combat troops. Kerry's proposal will be budget neutral because he will streamline some large weapons programs, reducing the total amount of money spent on missile defense. More emphasis will be put on electronics, advanced sensors and munitions.

A Responsive VA

Under George Bush, 280,000 veterans await their disability rating and 108,000 other veterans wait to hear back on appeals of rating decisions. John Kerry will streamline the VA so veterans hear about their status and receive benefits in a timely manner.

Properly Compensate Soldiers and Their Families

We need to treat our troops and their families with respect, dignity, and fairness in what they are paid, where they live, and where their children go to school. We need to make sure our troops are paid enough to increase retention and enlistment. We should improve active duty housing for soldiers and their families. As someone who has led the fight on Gulf War Illness, John Kerry knows we have to be aggressive on health screenings for our troops. These

screenings – not being currently done -- are required by law. John Kerry will bolster Family Assistance Centers and Programs on every military base to provide information and services to families of deployed, wounded, or killed service members.

[Full Accounting for POWs/MIAs](#)

John Kerry and Senator John McCain chaired the country's most thorough investigation into the fate of POWs/MIAs in Southeast Asia. Kerry personally pressed Vietnamese officials to cooperate in ongoing efforts to get answers for families and also sponsored POW/MIA Recognition Day. Kerry's Senate committee pressed for unparalleled declassification of documents, increased excavation work in Vietnam, and gathered testimony from 144 witnesses. According to the *Boston Globe*, "the effort produced real answers for the some 120 families who had lived for decades without knowing whether a loved one was still alive in Southeast Asia."

[Combating Homelessness](#)

Studies estimate more than 30 percent of homeless men in America are veterans. In 2001, Kerry worked to pass the *Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act*, an ambitious effort to completely end homelessness among veterans. Kerry will work to make sure veterans have the support they need to find housing and jobs as well as the social support they deserve.

[Supporting National Guard and Reservists](#)

John Kerry will provide mortgage insurance to National Guard and Reservists called to active duty. This will ensure that service members who have to take a cut in pay don't have to worry about losing their homes while serving our nation.

More than one-third of Reservists and National Guard members suffer a pay cut when called to duty. Many of these military service members are professionals with families. Unlike big businesses that can provide supplemental income, most small businesses can't afford to provide this benefit. With tax credits for small businesses, John Kerry can ensure steady income for National Guard and Reservists' families.

[Guaranteeing Reservists Have Health Care](#)

Kerry supports legislation to provide access to TRICARE for military reservists. This improves readiness of reservists called to active duty and provides care for their families without disruptions. For families that do not live near a TRICARE provider, or that have children or special medical needs, it may be impractical to use a TRICARE provider. In these cases, Kerry supports allowing reservist families to keep their civilian insurance through COBRA.

[Helping Family Members Who Lose a Loved One](#)

In 2003, the Bush Administration opposed increasing the death gratuity – from \$6,000 to \$12,000 -- paid to families of those who die in action. John Kerry supports increasing the death benefit and making the payment *tax-free*. He supports restructuring compensation provided to surviving families by mandating \$250,000 non-taxable life insurance plans for all service members and eliminating all soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines serving in harms' way, the obligation to pay individual premiums. He will fight to provide surviving spouses of service members killed-in-action with one year of military pay equal to what would have been earned and permitting surviving spouses and children of service members killed-in-action to remain in military housing for one year after the death of their spouse.

[“John Kerry: Fighting for America’s Veterans” [John Kerry for President](#)]

“Service to our nation is something we should not only promote, but also honor.”
Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry

The Democratic Party:
We Honor Veterans and Their Families