



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF

CONGRESSMAN

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**CONGRESSMAN RODRIGUEZ CALLS FOR
QUICK PASSAGE OF VETS HEALTH BILL**

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez, the ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, today called for quick passage of legislation to guarantee full funding for VA health care. Congressman Rodriguez on June 4 joined senior House Veterans' Affairs Committee members and other Members of Congress to introduce H.R. 2318, The Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act of 2003, legislation that would require the VA to provide funding for veterans' health care based on the number of eligible veterans and the cost of providing hospital care and related services.

“Plain and simple, the current system does not provide enough for the very real health care needs of America’s veterans,” said Congressman Rodriguez. “Not only is the current funding not adequate, the uncertainties of the annual appropriations process make it difficult for the VA to plan. We need a guaranteed funding stream to provide veterans the health care they need and deserve. It’s a disgrace that America’s veterans have to wonder every year whether their government will provide for their medical needs.”

Last week the President’s Task Force to Improve Health Care Deliver For Our Nation’s Veterans issued its final report and highlighted the “growing mismatch between funding and demand” for veterans’ health care. To address the need for “full funding”, the report recommended changes “to the current budget and appropriations process, by using a

mandatory funding mechanism, or by some other changes in the process that achieve the desired goal.”

“The legislation we have introduced would satisfy the Task Force recommendations,” said Congressman Rodriguez. “It would give us a one-time 30 percent increase for this fiscal year and then create a steady funding mechanism, once and for all, to make sure that we meet our obligations to America’s veterans. I urge the House leadership to move this legislation as quickly as possible.”

Currently approximately 150,000 veterans wait more than six months for health care services. Even with funding increases proposed in the joint budget resolution, the VA will still impose constraints on access to veterans and has identified more than \$1 billion in “management efficiencies,” which effectively requires the VA to raise the amount of co-payments paid by veterans for services and prescription drugs.