

As the yearly budget process has been heating up in the House of Representatives, many folks across Virginia's First District have expressed their concerns about proposed changes to the health care benefits promised to our nation's veterans. I too am concerned about these proposals, and I want to stress my commitment to our veterans and my respect for the selflessness and sacrifice shown by these devoted patriots and their families.

The administration's budget proposal for the 2013 fiscal year includes many changes to both future and existing health care plans offered to veterans. Among other provisions, the budget includes new enrollment fees for various types of TRICARE plans as well as changes to other aspects such as deductibles and pharmacy co-pays. Folks across the spectrum of the TRICARE program would be affected, including retirees of all ages, National Guard and Reserve members, and family members of active duty servicemen and women. Of course, the presentation of the president's budget is only the first step in the annual budget process, so Congress will continue to deliberate these sorts of changes as the budget process continues both in committees and in the House of Representatives as a whole.

As we all know, the Department of Defense is currently under severe budget restrictions that require Pentagon leadership to pursue efficiencies across the defense budget; however, I want to be very clear that I believe our nation's veterans have served this country honorably and selflessly, and that our economic problems should not and cannot be solved on their backs. I remain committed to defending the benefits that our veterans have earned and ensuring that this nation's retirement and health care system for our servicemen and women remains sustainable for future generations. The fabric of our nation's freedom was sewn by our veterans; it is essential that we treat them with the respect and dignity they have earned and deserve.

Of course, health care services like TRICARE are not the only way for us to recognize the selfless service of our veterans. We can also be proactive in ensuring that our talented veterans are being prepared successfully for careers in the private sector. I was proud to vote for a bill (H.R. 674) in November that established a new program of retraining assistance to help our veterans as they look for jobs, in addition to providing tax credits for businesses that hire veterans. This bill also enhanced the Transition Assistance Program for members of the Armed Forces who are being separated from active duty service. These are common-sense policies that can truly make a difference in the lives of a dedicated group of citizens whose selfless actions have preserved the freedoms that we all hold so dear.

As a member of the House Armed Services Committee and Chairman of the Subcommittee on

Oversight and Investigations, I will continue to fight for our veterans and work to honor our nation's promise to those committed citizens who don the uniforms of our Armed Forces. As always, please continue to contact me through email on my website (www.wittman.house.gov), by phone

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