

## MEMORANDUM

May 23, 2003

TO: Governor

FROM: John

RE: Veterans info

I talked with Prentice Nelson of the DGA earlier today. He is in the state working on veterans issues and asked me to pass this information to you.

*Pelosi: 'Democrats' Veterans' Package Fulfills Moral Obligation to Those Who Serve'*

Washington, D.C. House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi held a news conference today with veterans' groups and House Democrats to unveil the Democratic "Salute to Veterans and the Armed Forces" package. Below are Leader Pelosi's remarks and a summary of the plan:

"In recent months, the American people have been inspired by the courage, professionalism and patriotism of our men and women in uniform in Iraq.

"The United States military is the besttrained, bestled, bestequipped force for peace in the world because we have the best soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen in the world.

"As we approach Memorial Day, the thoughts and prayers of all Americans are with the families who have lost a loved one. We pray also that the wounded

may be healed and that those still in harm's way will return to the loving arms of their families.

"As a Congress, as a nation, must resolve to let their service renew our mission to build a future worthy of their sacrifice. That begins with taking care of those who defend our country today and fulfilling our debt to our veterans who defended us in the past.

"Unfortunately, just as U.S. forces were fighting their way across Iraq, House Republicans passed a budget in the dead of night that dishonored our veterans by not providing adequate funding for veterans' programs.

"Fortunately, Democrats forced a vote to reject the cuts for the first year. That vote was just a first step in doing right by our veterans.

"Today is the next step. Today, House Democrats are unveiling a comprehensive package of benefits to keep America's sacred obligation to care for our military forces and their families.

"And I particularly want to commend my colleagues Ike Skelton, Jack Murtha,

Charlie Rangel, Lane Evans, John Spratt, Alan Mollohan, David Obey, George Miller, Chet Edwards, Rosa DeLauro, Barney Frank, Bob Filner, Jan Schakowsky, Maxine Waters, Mike Michaud, and Bill Pascrell for their work in developing a package that honors those serving today, those who served yesterday, and those who will serve tomorrow.

"For our forces and their families serving today, we include: a well-deserved bonus for personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan; increased educational opportunities for reservists and National Guardsmen; and an extension of benefits for husbands and wives whose spouses made the ultimate sacrifice.

"For our veterans, those who served yesterday, we support their longstanding demand for so-called concurrent receipt so disabled veterans can receive both the disability pay and the retirement pay they have earned and deserve. We work to reduce the national disgrace that has 200,000 veterans waiting up to six months for an appointment at Veterans Affairs

hospitals. And we take action to block the Bush Administration's proposed increase in prescription drug copayments for veterans and unfair enrollment fees.

"This package also sends a powerful message to those considering enlisting tomorrow that America will always care for those who serve.

"In the war in Iraq, Americans have learned again the truth behind the inscription on the Korean War Memorial 'freedom is not free.'

"The comprehensive package of veterans benefits that we are unveiling today ensures that America will fulfill its moral obligations to those who have paid the high price for our freedom those who have worn our nation's uniform."

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## Democratic Salute to Veterans & the Armed Forces

### Fact Sheet

Today, House Democrats unveiled a comprehensive package of benefits designed to honor the contributions of those who have served America in the Armed Forces. The Democratic package strengthens the entire system by ensuring

that those who are serving today have incentives to continue, those who served in previous conflicts are properly honored, and those who choose to serve in the future are coming into a system that is the best in the world.

The Democratic package concentrates on crucial benefits for retired and disabled members of the military, makes health care for veterans more accessible and affordable, and expands educational opportunities for reservists. The plan further enhances benefits for the families of those killed while on active duty, and gives an essential "thank you" to our troops now returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Democratic Salute to Veterans and the Armed Forces Package addresses the needs of retired and disabled members of the military. The Democratic plan allows for concurrent receipt, reversing an outmoded and unfair system of compensation for disabled veterans who are retired from the military. Under current law, veterans who are entitled both to a retirement benefit for

military service and serviceconnected disability compensation are not able to receive both retirement and disability payments. Under the Democratic plan, those who qualify will receive retirement pay as well as full disability compensation, meeting an important promise to those who helped build America's strength and security.

The Democratic plan also expands important outreach efforts to veterans, making sure they know all of their rights and are properly informed of any changes to their benefits.

The Democratic package helps make healthcare accessible and affordable for America's veterans. The Democratic package would block increases in prescription drug copayments for veterans and the new \$250 enrollment fees that were proposed by the Bush Administration and included in the Republican budget resolution. The plan would also work to reduce long waits for Veterans Administration medical care.

In the current VA health care system, it often takes months to see a doctor,

and sometimes even longer to get a claim processed. In fact, 14,000 veterans entitled to expedited claims have waited longer than 15 months for action and approximately 200,000 veterans are waiting six months or more for an appointment at VA hospitals. The Democratic plan would set clear guidelines, and enforce existing standards, for healthcare decisions by the Veterans Administration. The plan would require the VA to make healthcare appointments in 14 days, and would require interim payments of \$500 a month when disability claims have not been decided within 180 days.

The Democratic package invests in educational opportunities for those who serve. The Democratic plan offers those who are members of the Reserve or National Guard increased educational opportunities that keep pace with current improvements to the Montgomery G.I. Bill. Currently, there are stark differences between what is available to active duty military personnel and

what others can access. The Democratic plan will help the programs keep pace with what is needed by today's men and women who serve, increasing the education benefit for reservists and indexing the benefit to keep pace with the active duty benefit in current law.

The Democratic package honors the families of those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The Democratic plan will end an unfair policy that reduces at age 62 the benefits received by the spouses of those who retire from the military or are killed in the line of duty. This improvement to the system will provide for families, making sure they are able to meet their needs now and in the future.

The Democratic package thanks our men and women in uniform returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. For the nearly 500,000 men and women who served in the recent conflict and were in imminent danger, the Democratic plan includes a \$1,000 bonus to demonstrate America's sincere appreciation for a job well done.

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