# Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 21, 2007

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

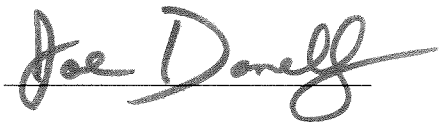
We write to urge that you immediately release the $3.7 billion in contingency emergency funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs included in H.R. 2764, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008.

The Department of Veterans Affairs continues to face significant challenges heading in to 2008. The Department has made virtually no progress in reducing the number of pending benefit claims awaiting a decision and has had little success in reducing the time a veteran waits to get a decision on his claim. VA regional offices remain understaffed due to past hiring freezes. The loss of veterans' personal identification data early this year shows that work remains to improve the department's security procedures. In terms of healthcare, serious concerns remain regarding wait times for initial appointments. The VA must also prepare for the growing wave of veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom that will seek care in the coming years.

Almost three years ago, your administration sent a budget request to the Congress that under funded the Department by over $1 billion. Further, the VA has repeatedly underestimated the number of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans that would seek care from the VA. Because of this history, we find the comments of White House Press Secretary Dana Perino that the VA's budget is already "robust" and that the White House would "take a look at [the contingency funding]" before releasing them to be troubling, and hope that they do not represent any Administration complacency on these critical matters.

We believe it is apparent that our nation's veterans deserve to have their Department fully funded and that the VA faces many significant challenges that require funding. As such, we request that once the Consolidated Appropriations Act becomes law, you immediately release the $3.7 billion in contingency emergency funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.



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