

## Bush Administration Turned Away Nearly 5,000 New Jersey Veterans Seeking VA Care in 2005

For Immediate Release: January 30, 2006

Contact: Kimberly Allen, (202) 226-8364, (571) 232-8037 [cell]

NEW DATA: Bush Administration Turned Away Nearly 5,000 New Jersey Veterans Seeking VA Care

Rothman Bill Would Require the Veterans Administration to Enroll Those Veterans

(Washington, DC)—New data show that the President's decision to ban priority 8 veterans from enrolling in the Veterans Administration (VA) health care system prevented 4,808 New Jersey veterans from receiving VA services. Calling this policy a shameful disgrace, Rep. Steve Rothman introduced legislation called the "Honor Our Commitment to Veterans Act" to reverse the Administration's policy on Priority 8 veterans' enrollment.

"With the President about to deliver his State of the Union address, in which he will likely reaffirm his commitment to our servicemen and women, he should understand that every time he cuts the budget for veterans' benefits and ignores the VA's clear need for additional funds, he not only hurts current veterans, but also weakens our ability to help today's servicemen and women when they'll need help. My legislation demands that the Federal government fully fund VA health care services so that no veteran in need is turned away," said Rothman.

President Bush's enrollment freezes at VA health facilities began in January 2003 after the Administration decided to cut costs by limiting veterans' access to VA hospitals, clinics and medications. Nationally, more than 260,000 veterans who applied to receive health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs have been turned away.

"Our nation made a commitment to all veterans. I am appalled by the fact that nearly 5,000 New Jersey veterans were refused health care by their own Veterans Administration. The President's decision to break our nation's promise to our veterans is shameful. What kind of message does this send to our soldiers in harm's way in Iraq and around the world?" said Rothman.

Priority 8 veterans are those who do not have service-related disabilities and whose incomes exceed the VA's threshold, which varies throughout the country. Since President Bush's freeze began, Priority 8 veterans in high cost-of-living areas, such as in Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties, have been particularly hard-hit. The majority of Priority 8 veterans in New Jersey live in Bergen County and the second largest concentration of veterans in the state is in Bergen County.

Rothman introduced the "Honor Our Commitment to Veterans Act" on their behalf and has rallied 48 co-sponsors, including the ranking Democratic member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL). Evans' office obtained the new data from the Veterans Administration.

###

Updated: February 15, 2006