

# Rothman Introduces "Honor Our Commitment to Veterans Act" to Lift Health Care Freeze for Priority 8

Congressman

NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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ROTHMAN INTRODUCES "HONOR OUR COMMITMENT TO VETERANS ACT" TO LIFT HEALTH CARE  
FREEZE FOR PRIORITY 8 VETS

--Bill Would Provide Access to Quality Health Care for All Vets --

Washington, D.C. -Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ9) today introduced a significant piece of legislation addressing the needs of the courageous men and women who have served our country in the armed services. Rothman's "Honor Our Commitment to Veterans Act," which he co-authored with Congressman Rob Andrews (D-NJ1), calls on the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to lift the freeze on the enrollment of new Priority 8 veterans into the VA health care system. 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. The Priority 8 threshold in Bergen and Passaic Counties is \$40,250 for individuals and \$46,000 for couples. The threshold varies in other parts of New Jersey. For example, the Jersey City area is listed at \$34,600 for individuals and \$39,550 for couples. Those veterans whose income exceeds the local threshold are currently prohibited from enrolling in the VA health care system.

Since the Bush Administration initiated the freeze in January 2003, Priority 8 veterans in high cost-of- living areas, such as in Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties, have been disproportionately and negatively affected. As a result, there have been cases where Priority 8 veterans in New Jersey have had to choose between paying for rent and paying for health insurance, simply because they could not afford both.

"By introducing this legislation, with support from both Democrats and Republicans, we are sending a message to the Bush Administration that veterans have had enough-Congress has had enough-it is time to give back health care access to all of America's veterans, regardless of their Priority status," said Rothman. "There are already over 170,000 veterans barred from receiving VA health care benefits and we have hundreds of thousands of troops returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq, many of whom will not be permitted to enroll in the VA system unless the freeze is lifted. The 'Honor Our Commitment to Veterans Act' is important to all of our veterans who are unfairly denied the quality, affordable health care they rightfully deserve."

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