





Congressman Buyer meets with local veterans to discuss veteran issues facing Congress.

## Dear Veteran:

I have advocated on behalf of veterans, service members and their families during 12 years of service on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, and 8 years on the House Armed Services Committee.

When soldiers who fought in the Persian Gulf War became ill after returning home, I successfully fought for a national registry to record the illness and symptoms many veterans were experiencing so that the medical professionals could help with diagnosis and improve the delivery of healthcare to those veterans.

When these same veterans were having trouble gaining access to healthcare services and disability compensation, I led a bipartisan effort to expedite healthcare delivery to Gulf War veterans and create a disability system for "undiagnosed illnesses."

When the VA healthcare system serving Northern Indiana was running out of funding, I developed an action plan between the Congress and the Veterans Administration to push through an "emergency appropriation" to keep the facilities operating and meeting the healthcare needs of Hoosiers who have served their country.

Meeting the needs of our nation's veterans will continue to be a major focus and priority. Please keep in touch by contacting any of my offices in Indiana or Washington with concerns you may have about benefits for veterans or accessing these benefits.

Sincerely,

Steve Buyer, Member of Congress

## Creating TRICARE For Life

As Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Military Personnel, in 2000, I authored legislation included in the Department of Defense FY 2001 authorization legislation to fulfill the promise to our nation's soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines of healthcare for life upon retiring from the military, called "TRICARE for Life."

### National Journal reported:

**"Buyer won enactment of what military officials term the greatest expansion of healthcare benefits for military retirees in at least three decades."**

This legislation included a three-year effort to revitalize the prescription drug benefit plan for America's military retirees, enabling them to receive prescription medications via network pharmacies or through mail order at their choice.

## Improving Healthcare Access and Benefits

**Concurrent Receipt:** Military retirees injured in combat, while training for combat, or who are 50% or more disabled, will for the first time be able to receive retirement benefits concurrently with veterans disability compensation.

**Improved Access:** The VA has reduced waiting time by more than 6 months for primary care, reduced time for the next available appointment from an average of 60 days to 24 days. And, there is now required priority scheduling of care for severely disabled service-connected veterans.

**Reduced Backlog of Claims:** In 2000, the backlog of appeals was a staggering 660,000 claims. Reducing this backlog has been one of Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi's and my top priorities. Today, this backlog has been reduced by two-thirds.

## Meeting The Needs Of Service Members And Families

Servicemen and women deal with a multitude of issues when they receive a permanent change of station or are deployed—from personal finances to retirement benefits.

H.R. 3024, legislation that I authored, will provide protections to service members who need to terminate motor vehicle leases entered into before a permanent change of station or deployment orders. This legislative provision, now law, was the first change to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act in forty years. It was incorporated into H.R. 100 and signed into law by President Bush on December 19, 2003.

Also, I worked to refine the retirement system, pay tables and to allow active duty and reserve components to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan.

## Funding For Veterans

Due to the leadership of President Bush, funding for veterans programs has been going up faster than in the past. Since 2001, funding for the VA has increased 27% and if this year's budget is approved the increase will be approximately 37%--a larger increase than the 1990s.

## New VA Clinic In Martinsville

To improve veterans' access to outpatient care the VA will open an outpatient clinic in Martinsville. The clinic is the result of the VA recognizing that an underserved veteran population lives around Indianapolis. Veterans in Martinsville and surrounding communities will benefit greatly from the decision to open a healthcare facility thereby increasing the access to quality care for those who served our nation in uniform. I am committed to build the clinic.