

As the vice-chair of the House Appropriations Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs subcommittee, I have been dismayed by the lack of attention the administration has offered our veterans. With our military stretched thin, our forces have had to endure extended deployments and multiple rotations, adding to the physical and mental stresses of war.

So I'm most pleased that 2007 has seen such amazing progress. Under new Democratic leadership, the House has already passed the largest funding increase in the VA's 77 year history. We have made headway toward clearing up the 400,000 pending disability claims at the VA and focused more attention on streamlining the transition from active duty to the VA system, ensuring our veterans the care they deserve.

There has also been progress on the establishment of a veterans' cemetery at the former Fort Ord. With federal and state roles defined, attention is now shifting to planning and design. The newly established Monterey County Citizens Advisory Committee for the Fort Ord Cemetery has been organized to oversee this important work and keep the cemetery proposal moving forward. I am also grateful for the ongoing efforts of the Central Coast Veterans Foundation and the many concerned individuals in our communities.

Though it provides excellent care, our local VA clinic is seriously cramped. That is why I'm working with local leaders, Veterans' Affairs and the Department of Defense to establish a joint VA/DoD health care facility located at the former Fort Ord. While this facility is still in the early phases of study, the Palo Alto VA and DoD have signed a memorandum of understanding to move the project forward.

I also recently launched an effort to increase Central Coast participation in the Veterans History Project, a Library of Congress initiative. Through this program, the recollections of our wartime veterans can be submitted through my office as part of a permanent archive. Each of America's veterans has an important story to tell, and it's my sincere pleasure to include your story as part of this collection.

For more information about any of these topics or for assistance or clarification about VA policies, health care or compensation claims, please call either of my district offices. Salinas: (831) 424-2229. Santa Cruz: (831) 429-1976.

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