

The debt that we owe to our nation's veterans is immeasurable. Their sacrifices and those of their families are freedom's foundation, and without the brave efforts of all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen and their families, our country would not live so freely.

As a member of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, I have continued to champion the cause of veterans on the Central Coast and across the country. With so many returning service members, now, more than ever, we must renew our commitment to keep our promises to the nation's more than 2 million troops and reservists, their families, and 23 million veterans, including almost 35,000 here in the Central Coast.

Earlier this month, the President submitted his budget request to Congress to begin work on the FY13 budget. The President requested \$64 billion in discretionary funds, mostly for medical care, and \$76 billion for mandatory funds, mostly for disability compensation and pensions. Highlights of the medical care budget include \$403 million for gender-specific health care needs of women veterans, \$6.2 billion for increased mental health services, and \$585 million in direct appropriations for medical research. The budget request also includes \$1 billion over five years for the creation of a Veterans Job Corps. During our consideration of this budget request, I will keep your issues and concerns in mind.

Late last year, Congress enacted the FY12 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act that includes \$61.2 billion in the discretionary account. During the process of putting together the bill, I also used my influence to include language in the bill and the accompanying report that will prevent the VA from spending additional funds to take care of the burial needs of urban veterans until the department creates a strategy to serve the 10% of our nation's veterans who have no access to a federal, state, or tribal cemetery:

The conferees are concerned that the NCA has failed to adequately serve the burial needs the nation's veterans in rural areas. The NCA fiscal year 2012 budget submission acknowledges that ten percent of all veterans will not have access to a burial option in a national, State or tribal cemetery. The majority of these underserved veterans live in rural areas, and the conferees are concerned that the NCA's Urban Initiative will exacerbate the disparity of burial services between urban and rural veterans. The conferees have included a provision in the bill prohibiting funds from being used to expand the Urban Initiative beyond the sites already outlined in the budget until the NCA submits to the Committees a detailed strategy to meet the burial needs of veterans residing in rural and highly rural areas. The report shall include a

timeline for implementation of such a strategy and cost estimates of establishing new burial sites in at least five rural or highly rural locations. This report shall be submitted no later than February 6, 2012.

I continue to work with both the Army and the VA to create a joint clinic on the Central Coast to serve veterans, active duty service members, and their dependents. As we all know, access to water is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome when constructing a new building, and I am working with these two agencies to ensure that the new clinic has access to the water it needs.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind. This day and every day, let us honor their service with actions that fulfill our commitment to our troops, their families, and our veterans – and that are worthy of our grateful nation.