

## May 26, 2005- Sanchez Speaks in Support of Full Funding for Veterans Benefits

### Sanchez Speaks in Support of Full Funding for Veterans Benefits on House Floor

"Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this amendment, because as a member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, I can tell you that people are the most precious resource in our Armed Forces.

"As we get closer to Memorial Day, a lot of us here in Congress are going to be talking about how important it is to support the troops and honor the veterans. That's a fine sentiment, and I agree 100%, but what does Congress actually do to follow through?

"Our obligation to support our troops by no means ends when they separate from their branch of service. Yet in an age of spiraling budget deficits, some folks in Washington seem all too willing to forget the promises we have made to our veterans.

"The Veterans Administration is chronically underfunded, and is struggling to provide the basic services and benefits that veterans have been promised.

"The President's proposed VA budget would have significantly raised out-of-pocket healthcare expenses for many veterans, by increasing prescription co-pays, and by requiring some veterans to pay a \$250 annual fee for the privilege of using government health care.

"The so-called 'increase' in the President's proposed VA budget included these increased fees - the actual budget increase did not even keep pace with inflation.

"Thankfully, my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee understand that raising out of pocket costs for veterans is NOT an acceptable answer to the VA funding problem, and this bill does not include those fees.

"The answer to our VA funding problem is to adequately fund the VA in the budget, so that veterans will receive the kind of care they were promised when they signed up to defend their country.

"While I am pleased that the Appropriations Committee saw fit to increase VA funding from the wholly inadequate amount requested by the President, I am disappointed that the efforts of Ranking Member Obey to provide significant additional VA funding -- \$2.6 billion for our nation's veterans, financed by reducing a tax cut for the very richest Americans -- were blocked by the majority.

"As a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, I readily advocate the importance of fiscal responsibility in government, but we cannot in good conscience balance the budget or reduce the deficit on the backs of veterans and their families.

"How we treat our veterans is a sign of our character as a nation - the men and women who have sacrificed so much in defense of our country deserve no less than the very best we have to offer in return. I yield back the balance of my time."