

November 2, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid, Majority Leader
United State Senate
Room S-221, United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

We are writing to thank you for working with Chairman Akaka to expeditiously move S. 1963, "The Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009" directly to the floor for a vote. With Veterans Day rapidly approaching, Senate approval of S. 1963 would be a fitting way to honor the men and women who have served and sacrificed to defend our nation and our liberty.

As you are aware, Chairman Akaka introduced S. 1963 to combine the content of two prior measures (S. 252 and S. 801) into a single VA health care omnibus bill that would make significant enhancements in VA health care services. S. 1963 contains widely-supported provisions that would help assure equal access to and quality of medical care for women veterans. The legislation would also provide desperately needed support to family caregivers of severely disabled veterans, particularly those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as expand mental health services, improve traumatic brain injury care and aid homeless veterans.

The Veterans' Affairs Committee previously approved both S. 252 and S. 801 earlier this year with unanimous, bipartisan support; however we understand that consent could not be reached to pass either of these bills on the floor because one Senator objected. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that the Senate now complete action on S. 1963 so that it can go to conference with the House, which has already approved similar legislation. It is essential that Congress act on this comprehensive measure without further delay. Thousands of disabled veterans with serious medical conditions and the family members who care for them are counting on this additional support.

No one can ever fully repay these veterans or their families for the hardships, pain and suffering sustained from their military service or for the personal sacrifices veterans and family caregivers have made and continue to endure. However, at minimum, we must ensure that VA provides high quality health care services for this nation's sick and disabled veterans, including the unique health care needs of women, as well as support the family caregivers on whom they depend.

We are grateful for all that you have done to improve the lives of America's veterans and we stand ready to assist you in moving this vital legislation through the Senate and ultimately onto the President's desk for his approval. Again, thank you for standing up for veterans.

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