

MARKING THE 9TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE START OF THE IRAQ WAR

HON. JIM McDERMOTT

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 22, 2012

Mr. McDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mark the 9th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. Nine years ago this month, members of the U.S. Armed Forces invaded Iraq in what became one of the bloodiest and most protracted missions in our military's history. Today, our country is still paying the extraordinary price for the nine years in Iraq, both in terms of lives lost and trillions of dollars that could have gone toward nation building here at home.

For many veterans, coming home marks the beginning of another fight—fight for treatment, care, and integration into civilian life. Invisible wounds of war, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, affect one in five veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I also submit an article by Jon Soltz, a former Iraq War veteran, on the need for my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to own up to the promise to care for veterans instead of paying lip service. The title of his article, "GOP Budget Doesn't Even Say The Word 'Veteran,'" speaks for itself.

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GOP BUDGET DOESN'T EVEN SAY THE WORD
"VETERAN"

(By Jon Soltz, Co-Founder of VoteVets.org
and Iraq War veteran)

Do Republicans care about keeping our promise to veterans?

Looking at the recently released GOP budget, written by Rep. Paul Ryan, it's hard to see how they do. In fact, looking at the nearly 100 page document, the word "veteran" doesn't appear once. Not once.

Today is the 9th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. Last night, I spoke with someone who served with me in Iraq during my first tour. And for the first time in almost nine years, she wanted to talk to me about an incident where she drove through an IED and a soldier was killed. It was a profound moment that shows how war and sacrifice stay with us, always. For those of us who served, in many ways, yesterday is today. And today, we read that the GOP doesn't even talk about veterans in their budget.

But, without saying the word "veteran," the budget tells us a lot about what they think about veterans. The budget calls for across the board spending freezes and cuts. If enacted, the Ryan GOP budget would cut \$11 billion from veterans spending, or 13 percent from what President Obama proposes in his own plan.

It's unconscionable that they'd do this at a time when so many Iraq veterans have just come home and rely on veterans care. Over 45,000 US troops were wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan, and more will come who will rely on VA services, on top of veterans of other wars and eras who depend on the VA. But, this shortsightedness isn't new.

Back in 2005, President Bush underfunded the Department of Veterans Affairs by about a billion dollars, despite its need. The result? Secretary Jim Nicholson was forced to crawl before Congress and plead with it to pass emergency supplemental spending, just so it could keep the doors open. After that debacle, I have to admit, I never thought Republicans would do the same thing again, if for

no other reason than that it just looks bad politically, leaving aside the horrible effect it would have on veterans in need.

Additionally, after the backlash against ending Medicare the last time Paul Ryan released a budget, they're at it again. That, too, affects veterans. I was speaking with one veteran in Missouri, who lost both of his legs in Iraq. His entire primary care now relies on Medicare. It pays for all of his primary care, as it does for so many veterans with 100 percent disability. So, no, I couldn't believe that Paul Ryan and the GOP would again propose ending Medicare.

Yet, here we are. A budget from the GOP that short changes veterans, horribly. And where does that money go? Not to reducing the debt. The debt as a share of GDP would actually increase under the Ryan plan. The money doesn't go towards anything, really. But it does go towards some people. As in \$3 trillion in tax giveaways to the richest Americans and corporations. People like Mitt Romney, who already pays a tax rate lower than most of our troops.

That's the choice the Ryan plan presents to America—do we want to fund the wealthiest Americans and corporations, or keep our promise to our veterans? Ryan and the GOP say the former. I can't believe that most Americans wouldn't say the latter.

PROTECTING ACCESS TO
HEALTHCARE ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. MAZIE K. HIRONO

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 21, 2012

The House in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union had under consideration the bill (H.R. 5) to improve patient access to health care services and provide improved medical care by reducing the excessive burden the liability system places on the health care delivery system:

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. Chair, this week we celebrate the 2nd anniversary of the Affordable Care Act.

The Affordable Care Act is designed to fix so many of the things that ail our health care system and burden everyday families. The new law has already had a major impact on families in Hawaii.

Senior citizens in Hawaii now have some relief from the high cost of prescription drugs. In 2010, over 24,000 people with Medicare in Hawaii received tax rebates to cover prescription drug costs.

One senior from Waimea on Hawaii Island told me her \$250 Medicare rebate check was "a blessing" in these tough economic times. She was able to use that money to pay for her other medical bills.

In 2011, more than 21,000 people in Hawaii with Medicare saved close to \$7 million on prescription drugs. The "donut hole" gap in coverage will be closed by 2020.

A mother in Kailua told me that because of the Affordable Care Act, she could now add her 21 year-old son and 24 year-old daughter to her work-sponsored insurance plan.

These are just two of the over 5,000 Hawaii young adults who can now stay on their parents' plan until age 26. This Kailua family is now using the thousands of dollars saved on health insurance each year for other household needs, including paying down past medical debt.

The old saying is true, that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Preventive services like mammograms, colonoscopies, and wellness visits can detect problems early and prevent higher costs later.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, nearly all 210,000 Hawaii people with Medicare can now get preventive services without a co-pay or deductible. In addition, 240,000 people in Hawaii with private insurance are now eligible for preventive services—including women's health services such as domestic violence screenings and contraception—without a co-pay or deductible.

The Hawaii Prepaid Health Care Act already covers employees who work for more than 20 hours per week. As a result, a large percentage of our people can get the healthcare they need to stay healthy. We have a low rate of uninsured. And that saves all of us money.

This is why I fought hard to preserve the Hawaii Prepaid Health Care Act in the House bill. I offered an amendment to preserve Hawaii's law and defended my amendment in committee, convincing my colleagues to support my amendment. Then, all of us in the delegation worked together to make sure the final Affordable Care Act law maintained Hawaii's law.

Because of Hawaii's Prepaid Health Care Act, most employers in Hawaii already provide health coverage. The Affordable Care Act makes it easier for Hawaii small businesses by providing tax rebates to help pay for health care costs. Nearly 29,000 Hawaii businesses are eligible for tax credits under the law.

Today I also met with leaders from eight of Hawaii's Community Health Centers. The Affordable Care Act helps fund these 73 health center sites that serve our highest-need rural and underserved communities, especially on the Neighbor Islands and rural Oahu. These health centers care for over 130,000 people and provide nearly 1,300 jobs throughout the state. The message these health leaders shared with me today is that the Affordable Care Act has made a positive difference in the lives of so many.

Given how much the Affordable Care Act is already helping Hawaii, it is unfortunate that some in Congress want to repeal it. Because they can't repeal the law all at once, they have continued to try to de-fund the law or repeal one piece at a time.

Today we're seeing another example of this, with H.R. 5. This bill would repeal the law's Independent Payment Advisory Board, also known as the IPAB.

This board is a panel of experts that will make recommendations so taxpayers aren't paying for unnecessary Medicare procedures. This will save taxpayers billions of dollars, while protecting Medicare patients. The board would not be allowed to recommend any cuts to reimbursement rates that ration or harm patient care. Congress would vote on the board's recommendations, or come up with an alternative that reduces cost growth by more.

In fact, because the Affordable Care Act has already reduced the growth in Medicare costs, the Board's recommendations wouldn't even be triggered until 2022 at the earliest.

I have heard from some medical providers in Hawaii who are worried the IPAB will recommend cuts to their specialty. These providers say they might choose not to see Medicare patients. I can understand their concerns, but here's the thing: Medicare costs are going