

□ *February 12th, 2011*

### **DICKS' STATEMENT ON ELIMINATION OF HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAM: "STUNNING EXAMPLE OF MINDLESS BUDGET SLASHING"**

A stunning example of the mindless nature of the Republican party's budget slashing exercise is the termination of a small but critical program that addresses the urgent nature of homelessness among America's veterans, according to the top Democrat on the U.S. House Appropriations Committee.

U.S. Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Wash.) said Saturday that "the mad rush by Republican lawmakers this week to produce budget cuts sufficient to reach an arbitrary \$100 billion plateau has resulted in an array of unconscionable proposals." He cited the proposed elimination of a \$75 million program that offers housing vouchers to homeless veterans in the U.S. as one of the most egregious examples.

The program is a cooperative effort between the Veterans Affairs Department (VA) and the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) that has been effective in providing a small element of stability in the lives of the military veterans – a population that has experienced a spike in homelessness in recent years.

According to a government report in 2009, at least 75,000 veterans were homeless on a single January night and a total of 136,334 veterans spent at least one night in an emergency shelter or transitional housing. An estimated 57 percent of homeless veterans were staying in emergency shelters and the remainder were living on the streets or abandoned buildings. Included in this population is a substantial portion of younger veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars – many battling drug and PTSD issues.

The VA has been charged by President Obama to reach the goal of ending homelessness among veterans in five years, and this one program—HUD/VA Supportive Housing – offered housing vouchers for more than 10,000 veterans across the nation in the past year and another 20,000 since 2008. HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan indicated to Congress last year that a total of at least 60,000 vouchers would be required to respond to the urgent need.

“The fact that this absolutely critical program was placed on a list of expenditures to be terminated in the Republican budget is indicative of how thoughtless and insensitive the process became after the most conservative members demanded further cuts in a budget that would already have caused tremendous harm and dislocation throughout the country,” Rep. Dicks said.

“As long as there are veterans sleeping in shelters, cars, under bridges and on the streets, we have an obligation to continue to increase this voucher program,” he said.

Dicks and others in the Democratic party leadership have called on Congress to adopt the five-year budget freeze sought by President Obama, arguing that it would “protect the nation’s still-fragile economic recovery better than the irresponsible and hastily compiled Republican budget.”

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