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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0529

HENRY A. WAXMAN
29TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

April 30, 2002

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Principi,

I am writing to express my deep concern about cuts in healthcare services for veterans at the West Los Angeles Veterans Affairs Medical Center (West LA VA).

The West LA VA has reduced the number of physicians caring for veterans, lowered staffing levels, and shifted remaining staff members to new positions. While Congress increased funding for the VA in 1998 and required improvements in mental health services, the number of mental health beds in the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, substance abuse treatment programs, and treatment of war-related post traumatic stress disorder have all been significantly reduced. I have been informed that bed shortages are preventing even severely disturbed, violent, and suicidal veterans from gaining admission for emergency psychiatric care.

I am also deeply concerned that cutbacks are harming the VA's ability to test and treat veterans with Hepatitis C (which Congress has also mandated) and provide other important healthcare services, including dental care.

We owe our veterans a deep debt for the great sacrifices they have made for our country. I believe the reductions at the West LA VA are taking an unacceptable toll on the quality of care veterans receive, and I urge you to intercede to reverse this erosion in services. I am very sympathetic to the need for additional federal funding for VA healthcare and will continue to work hard for increases in the future.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress