July 25, 2001

equitable access to the best health care at VA medical centers across America, and especially in the Northeast.

Along with Congresswoman KELLY and Congressmen GRUCCI, HINCHEY and GILMAN, we are introducing two bills to improve the way the VA allocates funding for veterans medical care across the nation.

In 1997, Congress passed legislation that authorized the VA to develop a new formula for allocating veterans medical care dollars across the country. At the time, veterans were moving from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West, and the VA’s formula then did not address how to allocate funding with this shift.

Unfortunately, the new formula developed by the VA still failed to address the changing demographics of the veterans population. The so-called Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation formula (VERA) did begin to provide additional medical care dollars to areas with growing veterans populations, but unfortunately, the VA did so by slashing funding to states with veterans populations that remained stable, like my own states of New Jersey and others in the Northeast.

I know firsthand about the law of unintended consequences. VERA has had the terrible effect of restricting access of veterans to medical care in my part of the country because my district in New Jersey is part of Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 3. This VISN has borne the brunt of VERA’s funding shift. According to the VA’s own figures, funding for VISN 3 has been reduced by 6 percent, or $54 million, at a time when other VISNs saw their allocations increase by as much as 47 percent or even 53 percent.

I continue to ask the VA how this practice is equitable and why medical care in the Northeast should be reduced.

New Jersey has the second oldest veterans population in the nation, behind Florida. Our state has the fourth highest number of complex care patients treated at VA’s hospitals. Yet New Jersey’s older, sicker veterans are routinely left waiting months for visits to primary care physicians and specialists or denied care at New Jersey’s two VA nursing homes.

Something is fundamentally wrong with the VERA allocation formula if it continues to decrease funding for areas where veterans have the greatest medical needs. All veterans, regardless of where they live, have earned and deserve access to the same quality of medical care—care that is too often denied under the current formula based.

That is why I rose today with nearly 30 of my colleagues to introduce these two bills. The first bill, the Veterans Equal Treatment Act, would repeal the VERA formula and direct the VA to devise a truly equitable allocation formula based on need.

The second bill, the Equitable Care for All Veterans Act, my own bill, requires the VA to take steps to account for regional differentials—the differences in the costs of providing care in some areas of the country due to the high cost of living, long travel distances, and like—in determining the national means test threshold. This threshold currently stands at $24,000 for veterans across the country, regardless of where they live.

We know that the costs of such basic necessities as housing and utilities differ across the country. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the ten least affordable States include New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Massachusetts, Maine, Vermont and Rhode Island. These States are parts of VISNs 1, 2 and 3—all three VISNs fare the worst under the present VERA allocation formula.

Mr. Speaker, VERA should be adjusted to reflect factors such as the high cost of housing in the means test. It is the least we can do to ensure that all veterans who need and deserve care are provided with access to VA medical centers.

I strongly encourage the Chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee to hold hearings on these issues, and to move forward with changes to the VERA allocation formula as outlined in these two bills.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. PETER A. DeFAZIO
OF OREGON
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, July 25, 2001

Mr. DeFAZIO. Mr. Speaker, earlier today on the vote to consider the previous question on this bill I intended to vote “no” but inadvertently voted “aye”.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ROSA L. DeLAURO
OF CONNECTICUT
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, July 25, 2001

Ms. DELAURO. Mr. Speaker, during rollcall vote No. 255 on H.J. Res. 50, I mistakenly recorded my vote as “no” when I should have voted “aye”.

TRIBUTE TO THE ORIGINAL 29 NAJOVA CODE TALKERS

HON. MARK UDALL
OF COLORADO
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, July 25, 2001

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers, who courageously served this country during WWII. The original 29 Navajo Code Talkers successfully sent thousands of messages, enabling the Marines and this Nation to achieve victory.

The war in the Pacific was brought to a close with the help of these original 29 Navajo code talkers and the hundreds of code talkers who followed. The Navajo, who bravely served this country, despite poor governmental treatment at home, should be commended for their service. I would ask my colleagues to join me, now and forever, in paying tribute to the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers who bravely served this nation. I am including an article from a recent edition of Indian Country Today, which recognizes the significant contributions of the Navajo Code Talkers.

[From Indian Country Today, July 11, 2001]

NAJOVA CODE TALKERS TO RECEIVE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS

TRUE RECOGNITION A DECADE AFTER HEROISM

(By Brenda Norrell)

SANOSTEE, N.M.—The late Harrison Lapahie’s Dine name Yieh Kinne Yah means “He finds things.” His son, Harrison Lapahie Jr., is honoring his father’s name by finding Navajo Code Talkers who will receive Congressional gold and silver medals.

Born here in Sanostee, officially in 1923 but closer actually to 1928, Harrison Lapahie served in the U.S. Marines using his Native tongue to transmit the code never broken by the Japanese during World War II. Aircraft bombers were “Jay-Sho” buzzards, dive-bombers were “Gini” chicken hawks and battleships were “Lo-Tso” whales.

The original 29 Navajo Code Talkers who created the code will join George Washington, Robert Kennedy, Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela as recipients of the Congressional gold medal, the nation’s highest civilian honor.

With beautiful piano music and galloping horses, an eagle and an American flag on his Web, Harrison Lapahie links readers worldwide to the legacy and history of the Navajo warriors being honored more than half a century after their heroism with their Dine-based military code.

Charles Hedin, Navajo working in health recovery with veterans in Denver, discovered the search for his uncle on the Web site. The late John Willie Jr. was among the original 29 being sought to be honored in Washington this month.

I was surfing the Web and I landed on Mr. Lapahie’s Web site. I didn’t know Zonnie Gorman was searching for relatives of Code Talkers. Filled with overwhelming pride, I called her and explained that John Willie Jr. was my uncle.

“We compared some notes and I also helped her to find Adolf Murgursky, another Code Talker.” Willie did not live long enough to receive his recognition.

“I have mixed emotions because the recognition for my uncle’s war contributions has come 50 years later,” Hedin said, “He helped bring the war in the Pacific to a close, impacting all Americans.”

Like Lapahie, Zonnie Gorman honors the memory of her father, Carl Nelson Gorman. The late artist, professor and storyteller and