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## Compare the Candidates



As a combat veteran, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass) knows firsthand the needs of those who served our nation. As president, Kerry plans a new compact with America's veterans that will provide mandatory funding of veterans' health care and proper compensation for soldiers and their families for military service. Kerry recognizes the U.S. military is now overstretched, with reservists severely overburdened. Kerry is calling for a temporary increase of about 40,000 active-duty Army troops, a proposal that will be budget neutral because he will streamline some large weapons programs, putting more emphasis on electronics and advanced sensors and munitions and by reducing the total amount of money spent on missile defense. At the same time, Kerry will support members of the National Guard and Reserve, providing them with mortgage insurance when they are called to active duty so if they must

take a pay cut they won't worry about losing their homes while in service to the nation.

### **In contrast, President Bush's record on veterans' issues is shameful:**

- The Bush administration plans to cut Veterans Affairs (VA) health care programs by nearly \$900 million in fiscal year (FY) 2006, according to Office of Management and Budget documents leaked this summer. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, June 1, 2004)
- Bush implemented rules ending access to health care for veterans who earned as little as \$28,000 in 2004. The VA estimated this change would exclude more than 500,000 veterans from health care coverage. (68 Fed. Reg. 2671, Jan. 17, 2003)
- Bush's FY 2005 budget proposes eliminating 540 claims processing staff. With a backlog of 348,000 disability claims, the average veteran already waits six months or longer for a claim to be processed. Bush's 2005 budget will drive an estimated 800,000 enrolled veterans out of the system. (Democratic Policy Committee, March 1, 2004)
- Bush opposed giving National Guard and Reserve members access to the Pentagon health care system—even though one-fifth of Guard members are uninsured. (Center for American Progress, "Claim vs. Fact: Treatment of Troops at a Time of War," citing Gannett News Service, 10/23/03)
- Bush proposed allowing employers to consider "training in the armed forces" as a basis for classifying veterans as professionals who are not eligible for overtime pay. (68 Fed. Reg. 15,589, March 31, 2003)
- Veterans take another slam from the Bush administration's plans to take away civilian workers' bargaining rights and enable U.S. Department of Defense officials to decide who is eligible to join a union and which issues a union can negotiate. The plan would allow the Pentagon to lay off workers without giving preference to veterans. (GovExec.com)

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