

June 11, 2007

The Honorable Pete V. Domenici
United States Senate
SH-328 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Domenici,

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) applauds your initiative in introducing S. 38, the “Veterans’ Mental Health Outreach and Access Act of 2007.” With the sheer number of troops – active duty, National Guard, and Reserves – returning with mental health issues from their deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan, it is our collective responsibility – and the direct responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs – to ensure that the infrastructure and services are available for them to deal with these issues.

In particular we are encouraged that your proposed legislation includes not only mental health services for the veteran and his/her immediate family, but also calls for peer counseling and support programs as well as the involvement of qualified community mental health centers. These are certainly steps in the right direction for our newest veterans to achieve recovery and self-sufficiency.

However, VVA believes that whatever strategies are ultimately considered, they must include an integrated system of psychosocial elements and services (e.g., symptom management, recovery strategies, housing, finances, employment, social support) in the manner developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) which are tailored to the individual veteran's needs for achieving the goals of successful mental health treatment, recovery, and local community reintegration. These elements are vital if our veterans are to really benefit from the services provided by the VA.

We would hope that hearings would be held to discuss this issue and your legislation, and we look forward to working with you to modify and enact your bill.

Sincerely,



John Rowan
National President.
Vietnam Veterans of America

cc: Senator Daniel K. Akaka, Chair, Veterans’ Affairs Committee
Senator Larry Craig, Ranking Member, Veterans’ Affairs Committee
Senator Barack Obama

