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## VETERANS AFFAIRS

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As the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Senator Akaka leads the Democrats in the Senate in safeguarding and improving services to our nation's 25 million veterans. Having served on the committee since joining the Senate in 1990, Senator Akaka has been a strong and vocal advocate for veterans and enjoys productive working relationships with veteran service organizations, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and his colleagues in Congress.

In early January of 2006, Senator Akaka held committee hearings on four different islands to examine the state of VA care in Hawaii. These hearings brought high-ranking VA and military officials from Washington D.C. to examine care for Hawaii's veterans and returning service members. At the hearings, Senator Akaka promoted his belief that the VA must provide a unique strategy to care for Hawaii's veterans because of the state's unique geography. Unlike other states that are geographically contiguous, stand-alone services are needed for each island in Hawaii, because it is not practical or financially feasible for veterans to travel between the islands for care. As a result of the senator's efforts, the VA will:

- 1) Provide \$1 million for improvements in mental health initiatives in Hawaii,
- 2) Establish a home health care program on Kauai,
- 3) Lift the home care restrictions on Maui,
- 4) Create tele-health capabilities on Molokai, and
- 5) Increase mental health services in Kona.

In addition, Senator Akaka is currently fighting to increase funding for the VA's overall health care system. Veterans are seeking care at VA hospitals and clinics in record numbers and Senator Akaka is working hard to ensure funding keeps pace with their needs.

In addition to improving health care for veterans, Senator Akaka is committed to the protection of veterans' compensation. Last year, VA undertook a review of 72,000 files of veterans who receive the maximum rate of compensation for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The review would have put many veterans at risk of losing their compensation and the only way to provide for their families. As a result of Senator Akaka's leadership, the VA discontinued the PTSD review process.