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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**MONTGOMERY SAYS "NO WAY"  
TO CHANGE IN MEDICAL CARE ELIGIBILITY**

"Forget it, there is no chance. The Veterans' Affairs Committee will never accept it; the Congress will never accept it; and the American people will never accept it. It's misguided and it's wrong."

Congressman G. V. (Sonny) Montgomery (D-MS), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, responded today to reports that the White House is actively considering deep cuts in medical care to veterans. The White House has ordered the Veterans Administration to come up with figures on how much the government could save by severely curtailing the health care eligibility of non-service-connected veterans who use VA medical facilities.

"Just over five months ago, we commemorated the 40th anniversary of D-Day, honoring the thousands of brave individuals who stormed those beaches in France," said Montgomery. "Now, just as they are turning 65 and are eligible for the health care this nation promised, the Administration is suggesting that we tell those same individuals, 'Sorry, pal. We appreciate what you did, but we're going to renege on our part of the commitment.'"

Montgomery said that the Nation "owes a debt to all veterans who served honorably, regardless of whether or not they sustained injuries or disabilities as a result of that service."

Montgomery warns that if health care is limited to veterans disabled in service, "the VA hospital system will shut down." According to the VA, veterans receiving treatment for service-connected disabilities and conditions comprise approximately one-third of its patients. "There simply would not be enough veterans using the system," said Montgomery.

Montgomery claims that should such a proposal be implemented, the result would be that some veterans could no longer afford necessary medical treatment. "In addition, Medicare costs would rise dramatically due to increased usage of private-sector health care facilities by veterans over age 65. So where are the savings?" asked Montgomery.

"Both the Committee and the House recognize that the VA must share the responsibility of trimming the deficit, and the record shows that we have accepted cuts, especially over the last four years," said Montgomery. "But we are going to protect our veterans' health care program!"

"If they're looking for ways to cut costs, this isn't the way," said Montgomery. "By denying health care to non-service-connected veterans, especially those who have depended on that health care being available at age 65, we would be breaking a long-standing promise and undermining the faith of all who served. We simply must not turn our backs on them."

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