

# BARACK OBAMA

October 20, 2008

John Gage  
National President  
American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO  
80 F Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President Gage,

I am writing regarding my concerns about Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) policies that threaten the delivery of health care and benefits to our veterans, and deprive them of valuable employment opportunities within the VA.

First and foremost, the way our nation provides funding for VA health care must be reformed. I recently cosponsored legislation to end the unpredictability and inadequacy of VA's discretionary funding process and instead, use an advance appropriations process that would allow Congress to provide VA health care dollars in advance and allow for improved planning and predictability. My Administration will recommend passage of advance appropriation legislation for the FY 2010 appropriations cycle, instead of yearly continuing resolutions that lead to delays in hiring and facility construction. I will also work to fully fund veterans care.

Earlier this year, I proudly voted for an expansion of GI bill benefits because I believe that access to an affordable college education is critical to a successful transition to civilian life and a secure future for veterans and their families. That is why I was deeply troubled to learn of the VA's initial plans to contract out work under the new law, using a closed bidding process that lacked an opportunity for current VA employees to compete to keep their jobs, despite their excellent track record and the large number of veterans in these positions. I am glad that the VA reversed itself and decided to administer the program in-house. Please let me know how I can be of assistance in helping the VA meet the ambitious goals set by Congress. As president, I will ensure that this landmark law is guided by the goal of educating veterans rather than enriching contractors.

My administration also will address the VA's personnel policies that have greatly eroded the Title 38 collective bargaining rights of nurses and doctors and other providers who work in VA medical facilities. The VA's interpretation of these rights circumvents congressional intent and weakens its ability to recruit and retain an adequate workforce to care for the men and women who have sacrificed in service of our nation and our freedom. Collective bargaining rights are fundamental for our workforce and will help ensure quality health care delivery. I also pledge that my administration's nominees will have a clear understanding of Title 38 collective bargaining rights.

Thank you, John, for all you and your members do for the American people.

Sincerely,



Barack Obama



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