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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Matsui said today that the Republican majority, which resulted in a \$1 billion shortfall for covering the current needs of veteran health care this year. Only after lengthy questioning of the VA undersecretary for health, did the Department of Veterans Affairs announce the shortfall found during an administration midyear budget review. “This \$1 billion shortfall in veteran health care funding was foreseeable and it was preventable,” said Matsui. “It is a shameful reflection of the misguided priorities of this administration that a tax-cut for the wealthiest of Americans was given a higher priority than funding the health care needs for our veterans.” Because of the preventable shortfall, VA facilities around the country are no longer scheduling appointments for new veterans. And veteran health care needs are growing. With protective armor and the improving quality of medical treatment in the field, more of our service members are surviving combat wounds and returning with an increased need for medical service. As of May of this year, more than 85,000 veterans returning from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have been treated by the VA. Further, the VA expects to treat 5.2 million veterans in 2006 – double the number in 1995. “Congress should not delay in resolving this funding shortfall. Each day we wait, our veterans are not receiving the care they need,” added Matsui. Numerous attempts to increase veteran health care funding have been made by Democrats this year – from offering an alternative budget to an amendment to increase funding in the Military Quality of Life–Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill and the Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill. Additionally, Democrats “new GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century” would ensure that health care remains accessible and affordable for our nation’s veterans. The measure increases funding for VA health care, including an additional \$3.2 billion. Continued Matsui, “This shortfall is a strong rebuke to the Republican majority and a signal that they need to reevaluate their priorities. We made a commitment to each of these men and women when they agreed to serve and protect our nation to provide them with superior medical services and we must uphold our end of the commitment.” ###