

has worked with you and have benefited greatly from your advice. President Bush and I came into office determined to raise the quality of veterans' health care, to get more money to the VA, and to trim the backlog in processing disability claims. Aided by your strong voice on Capitol Hill, we've been able to make a big difference for veterans and their families.

The President's budget for this year asks for nearly \$94 billion for the VA -- almost double what it was when we took office. And more than \$5 billion -- (applause) -- more than \$5 billion has been committed to new and expanded VA facilities across the country.

To expand educational opportunities for veterans and their families, President Bush was proud this year to sign a G.I. Bill for the 21st century. (Applause.) To provide better care for wounded warriors, we've implemented recommendations from Senator Bob Dole and Secretary Donna Shalala. And the President fixed an old problem for combat-injured and severely disabled veterans, when he signed concurrent receipt legislation -- making him the first President in more than a hundred years to do so. (Applause.)

For all the progress that's been made for veterans over these last seven and a half years, we're not easing up in the final months of our administration. We've got a fine leader at the VA, Dr. James Peake, who is the first physician and first general to serve as Secretary. We realize bureaucracies always need to be pushed -- and a retired three-star is a good one for doing the pushing.



President Bush said a long time ago that he intended to sprint to the finish line, and all of us who work for him are going to stay hard at it until our last day in office. I'll be putting on some miles myself next week, with an international trip that includes a stop in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia. That young democracy has been subjected to an unjustified assault, and the international community has joined in condemning Russia's invasion of a sovereign, democratic neighbor and its recognition of Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

America has sent in large amounts of humanitarian aid, along with a clear message to the people of Georgia: We support their democracy, and we'll work with our allies to ensure Georgia's territorial integrity as a free and independent nation. The Georgian people won their freedom after years of tyranny, and they can count on the friendship of the United States. (Applause.)

Come January, President Bush and I will turn our duties over to others. I realize the Annual Convention of the American Legion is not a political event, and I will not speak this morning about the presidential campaign. (Applause.) But in present company, there's one thing I have to say. I am proud and delighted that next week, your fellow Legionnaire, Senator John McCain of Arizona, will be nominated for President of the United States. (Applause.)

On my final visit to the American Legion as Vice President, I also want to thank each of you for the unstinting support you are giving to the men and women serving in our military today. I know it means