

STATEMENT OF
DENNIS CULLINAN, DIRECTOR
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

WITH RESPECT TO

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES GOALS FOR VETERANS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

JANUARY 28, 2009

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.4 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW) and our Auxiliaries, we appreciate the opportunity to present our views and concerns on this year's legislative priority goals for veterans.

VA Health Care

The VFW calls on Congress to pass a sufficient budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs so that it can properly care for all of America's sick and disabled veterans.

The VFW urges funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs to be sufficient, predictable and timely, ending the trend of the last decade wherein VA's budget has been delivered months late.

Congress must ensure that the unique health care and benefits challenges of OEF/OIF veterans are met, to include increased funding for Traumatic Brain Injuries and other related disabilities, as well as improved access to care, especially for veterans suffering from mental illness and for the growing number of women veterans accessing the system

The VFW calls on Congress and VA to increase priority given to women veterans by providing adequate services by hiring specialized health care providers and by providing training in gender-specific issues to help address shortfalls in gender-specific care and mental health care services for PTSD, Military Sexual Trauma and other needs.

The VFW urges the Department to improve outreach so that all veterans are aware of the range of health care services and benefits available to them, especially with female, minority and rural veterans, who may be less aware of their rights than other groups of veterans.

VA Benefits and Compensation

The VFW asks Congress to provide adequate resources to enable the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to reduce the current backlog of claims.

To protect the needs of current and future veterans, the VFW opposes any changes to the current definition of “line of duty,” structural changes to the programs for disability and survivors’ benefits, or curtailment of veterans’ or beneficiaries’ rights of entitlement or to appeal benefit decisions.

Seamless Transition

The VFW demands a truly seamless transition for those men and women serving in uniform who are transferring from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veterans Affairs. We envision a system with a truly integrated electronic medical record that travels wherever the service member is stationed eventually to VA where it follows the veteran to wherever he or she receives health care.

The VFW urges Congress and the Administration to improve the transition services and benefits provided to our veterans to ensure a steady and safe return to civilian life, including viable training, employment and education programs that address the realities of the current and future job markets to provide meaningful careers and not just temporary jobs.

Military Quality of Life

The VFW calls on Congress to fully fund all programs that enable our troops to succeed in their mission. We must ensure our active duty, guard and reserve members are provided increased pay, affordable health care, and adequate housing and work facilities for themselves and their families.

Employment

The VFW calls on Congress to ensure that the provisions of the Uniformed Service Employment and Re-Employment Rights Act (USERRA) are strictly enforced.

Support the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve in its efforts to educate employers on the ever-increasing importance of hiring National Guard and Reserve members and the employer’s responsibilities as mandated by USERRA.

Urge Congress to amend P.L. 106-50 to state that the three percent government-wide procurement goal for Service Disabled Veteran-owned Small Businesses should be mandated and require agencies to report their procurement levels and held accountable if they fail to meet their three percent SDVOSB procurement requirement. We further urge Congress to exercise oversight to ensure adherence to existing laws related to SDVOSB and Executive Order 13360 with the goal of meeting and exceeding the three percent government procurement requirement for SDVOSBs

We thank this committee for the opportunity to share our views, and we welcome any questions.