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Veterans' Health Care

VFW's Concerns:

For too long VA has resourced to a number instead of requesting the resources it needs to meet demand. For the first time, VA's budget request nearly mirrors the Independent Budget's (IB) recommendations. VA has requested $1.3 billion above the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 advance appropriations authorization from last year, making VA's FY 2016 request $63.2 billion, while the IB request sits at $63.3 billion. However, the FY 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations (MilConVA) bills that have advanced in Congress fail to provide VA the resources it has requested. The House's MilConVA bill falls $1.5 billion short of VA's request. VA has estimated that the impact of underfunding its medical care accounts by $640 million is equivalent to the cost of providing health care to more than 70,000 veterans for an entire year.

VA provides a monthly stipend, mental health and medical care, and respite care for caregivers of severely disabled Post-9/11 veterans, but not to caregivers of veterans of previous eras. The VFW believes that severely wounded, injured and ill veterans of all conflicts have made incredible sacrifices, and that all family members who care for them are deserving of equal recognition and support.

Suicide among military personnel and veterans presents a serious challenge to VA, the Department of Defense and the nation. A recent study of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans finds that recently discharged veterans are up to 61 percent more likely to commit suicide compared to the United States general population. The VFW applauds the passage of the Clay Hunt SAV Act, which made significant strides to address this critically important issue. The next step is to ensure veterans with military related mental health conditions who receive administrative discharge have access to the mental health care they deserve.

On today's battlefield, both men and women are similarly at risk. As an unprecedented number of women have entered the combat zone in the last decade, the number of women veterans enrolled in VA health care has doubled and will continue to grow. VA must be ready and able to provide the gender specific health care women veterans have earned and deserve.

Veterans who were exposed to toxic substances during their military service deserve to know whether their health conditions are associated with such exposure. Countless veterans have suffered for far too long without the care and benefits they deserve.
No veteran who has honorably served this Nation should have to suffer the indignity of living on the streets. VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development have made progress reducing veterans' homelessness in recent years as a direct result of coordinated efforts across multiple government agencies to provide transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and employment programs for veterans in need. Yet, nearly 50,000 veterans are homeless on any given night.

VFW's Solutions:

- Congress must properly fund VA to ensure it is able to provide timely access to high quality health care to all eligible veterans.
- Congress must extend current caregiver benefits to those who care for veterans of all eras.
- VA and Congress must ensure veterans with military related mental health conditions, who receive administrative discharges, have access to VA mental health care services.
- VA must ensure that its health care and services programs are equal amongst men and women veterans.
- Congress and VA must ensure veterans who were exposed to toxic substances receive care and benefits for all associated health conditions, as well as support research into the long-term effects of such exposures.
- Congress must properly fund homeless veterans programs to ensure the Administration is able to meet its goal of ending veterans homelessness.