

VFW WASHINGTON WEEKLY
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NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE

1. VA Proposal Would Charge Disabled Vets for Care: The administration's VA budget request for FY 2010 includes a proposal that would bill veterans with private insurance for their service-connected disability treatments. The budget calls for about a \$1 billion dollar increase in collections from FY 2009. We believe that the revenue projections for the proposal make up the bulk of the third-party collections increase. VFW vehemently opposes any attempt to pass healthcare costs on to wounded and service-connected disabled veterans. Billing a veteran's private insurance could lead to higher premiums and make it difficult for veterans and their families to obtain or retain their health insurance, as well as discourage employers from hiring disabled vets. The VFW is asking all members as well as all Americans to contact their congressional delegations and urge them to stop this proposal from happening. To send a message to your legislators, go to: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/issues/alert/?alertid=12844211>. To read the VFW Press Release, go to: <http://www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=news.newsDtl&did=4952>.

2. House VA Committee Hearings: The House VA Committee had a busy week of hearings.

Tuesday:

- **Subcommittee on Health:** VFW testified on several recently-introduced bills designed to expand healthcare options for veterans. VFW supported all four bills with special emphasis on HR 1211, "*The Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act*." The legislation would expand access and improve upon VA's current services for female veterans. With the number of female servicemembers increasing, and those using VA after service on the rise, there is no better time for VA to begin enhancing access and improving its services for this unique group of veterans.
- **Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs:** An oversight hearing was held on a recent VA Inspector General report that investigated document mishandling at several VBA regional offices. Belinda Finn, Assistant Inspector General for Auditing, discussed the vulnerability of veterans' claims and the accuracy of benefit claim dates. Some of the new committee members questioned the need for duplicate documents being provided by veterans. Chairman John Hall (D-NY) asked Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits Michael Walcoff about the status of VA's electronic medical file project. Hall noted that moving quickly on implementation would help VA to move away from endless files, thus reducing the chance for loss. The VSO panel discussed accountability, demands made on employees to finish claims quickly and overall lack of management at senior levels.

Wednesday:

- **Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity:** VFW presented testimony on a host of bills regarding employment, vocational rehabilitation, education benefits, USSERA, and VA's homeless program. One of the bills, *HR 950* introduced by VA Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA), did not garner the support of VFW or VA. The legislation would allow distance learning students to be eligible under the new GI Bill for the same stipend as those students attending regular college classes. Under current law, the new chapter 33 education benefits will not pay living stipends to distance-learning students.

To qualify for the stipend, a person must have at least one class in a regular classroom and carry a credit load that makes them at least a half-time student. VFW testified that Filner's bill would create an inequity by paying living stipends that are not based on actual costs that veterans would face while going to school.

To read VFW testimony and for more on the hearings, visit the House VA website at:

<http://veterans.house.gov/>.

NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. President Announces Troop Withdrawal: The President announced late last week "that the United States will pursue a new strategy to end the war in Iraq through a transition to full Iraqi responsibility." His plan is to proceed carefully with the responsible removal of all combat brigades from Iraq within the next 18 months. He stated that the combat mission will end Aug. 31, 2010. At that time the U.S. military presence will be a transitional force manned by 35,000 to 50,000 troops. By the end of 2011, all U.S. troops will be removed from Iraq.

2. Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-CA) introduced H.R. 1283 this week to end the restriction on homosexuals serving in the Armed Forces. This initiative would repeal Section 654 of Title 10, US Code, and replace it with a "policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation in the Armed Forces." Under current policy, referred to as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," homosexuals may serve only if they keep their sexual orientation private. Her bill currently has 123 co-sponsors. **Note:** *The VFW has carried a resolution for 23 years opposing homosexuals from serving in the military.*

3. Reserve Component Mobilization: The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 94,472; Navy Reserve, 6,390; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 15,487; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,307; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 666. This brings the total number of mobilized Guard and Reserve personnel to 124,322, a decrease of 272 from last week. These figures include the totals of voluntary and involuntary activated Reserve Component members. Of this total, 90,513 personnel have been involuntarily mobilized, while 33,809 are voluntarily serving on active duty. Total activated since 9/11 is 696,872.