

**VFW WASHINGTON WEEKLY**  
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**1. VA Spending Bill Passes Senate:** This week, the Senate cleared the Military Construction-VA Appropriations bill. The bill, *HR 3082* now moves to conference committee. The Senate funding package provides \$133.9 billion dollars for VA and Military Construction with \$53.2 billion for veterans programs including \$34.7 billion for medical services and \$4.6 billion for mental health care. \$2.1 billion dollars was set aside to address specific care and services for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. It includes advanced funding for healthcare in 2011 as well. A VFW-supported amendment sponsored by Senator Tim Johnson (D-ND) , which would set aside \$50 million dollars to renovate vacant VA buildings to help an estimated 131,000 homeless veterans find housing also passed. The House passed their bill in July. They will now try to resolve differences before sending it to the President's desk.

**2. Vet Health Care Bill Clears Senate:** A comprehensive bill improving veteran's health care cleared the Senate yesterday (98-0). The bill, *S. 1963, The Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009* had been stalled by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) due to costs. The legislation includes six VFW-supported bills - some of the key provisions are:

- Studies on access to care for female veterans
- Improvements in training and care for Military Sexual Trauma
- Providing child care services for veterans seeking treatment at VA
- Expanding services to veterans in rural areas
- Providing caregiver support, counseling and a stipend for family members taking care of veterans
- Allowing catastrophically disabled veterans emergency care outside VA
- Enhanced programs aimed at reducing homelessness among veterans

For more on the bill type the bill # into the box at: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

For the Senate Press Release go to the Senate VA website at: [http://veterans.senate.gov/press-releases.cfm?action=release.display&release\\_id=3f02fe9d-40b4-4f1b-bdd9-f3d82a021c7f](http://veterans.senate.gov/press-releases.cfm?action=release.display&release_id=3f02fe9d-40b4-4f1b-bdd9-f3d82a021c7f)

**3. Senate Talks Veterans Employment:** The Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing on employment focusing on the needs of veterans recently separated from active duty. Current statistics show the unemployment rate of returning veterans to be among the highest at 11.6%. Raymond Jefferson, Assistant Secretary for Veterans Employment and Training (VETS), Department of Labor discussed current VETS initiatives to include its competitive grant programs and their role in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Committee members probed representatives from wounded warrior transition teams, Microsoft, and Oracle for ideas on how to improve current programs and transition services to veterans.

For more on the hearing or to view the live webcast visit the Senate VA website at:

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

**4. Adaptive Grants Topic of House VA Hearing:** The House VA Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing regarding current changes in VA's adaptive grants program. Last year Congress provided increases to both the Specially Adapted Housing Grant, the Special Housing

Adaptation Grant and introduced a new housing program, the Temporary Residence Assistance Grant for disabled servicemembers temporarily residing in a home owned by a family member. VFW supported the increases and the new program and continues to call for help addressing the growing needs of our severely disabled veterans. Chairwoman Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin (D-SD) requested that VA provide accurate numbers of those using the benefit and eligibility requirement changes to the committee. For testimony and more on the benefit visit the House VA website at: <http://veterans.house.gov/>

**5. VA-DOD Disability Evaluation Pilot Expanded:** VA and DOD announced six additional sites for the Disability Evaluation System pilot program that was implemented in 2007. The pilot program is designed to eliminate the duplication, time constraints and confusing elements of disability evaluations being done by both VA and DOD. Authorized as a part of the FY 2008 NDAA, the program is designed to streamline the process into one medical exam and a single disability rating. To date over 5,431 service members have participated. The new locations include: Fort Benning GA; Fort Bragg, NC; Fort Hood, TX; Fort Lewis, WA; Fort Riley, KS and Portsmouth Naval Medical Center in Virginia.