

VFW WASHINGTON WEEKLY
February 5, 2010

In This Issue:

- 1. FY 2011 Budget Released**
- 2. VFW Testifies on VA Budget**
- 3. House VA Subcommittee Hearings**
- 4. Vietnam MIA Identified:**

1. FY 2011 Budget Released: The Administration on Monday released its budget requests for Fiscal Year 2011, which begins Oct. 1. VFW Commander-in-Chief Thomas Tradewell applauded the increases provided for the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense and Homeland Security, saying “The president's vision tracks with key VFW legislative goals that advocate for a strong and secure America, and for ensuring that those who serve in uniform are properly cared for by a grateful nation.” Budget highlights include:

For VA:

- \$5.2 billion to provide specialized care for PTSD and TBI injuries, and other mental health programs
- \$3.3 billion in Information Technology funding to automate GI Bill and disability claims processing, as well as to create a single electronic military service and medical record to ease the transition of military personnel into the VA
- \$2.5 billion for VA Medical Center construction and improvements
- \$800 million to help reduce veterans’ homelessness
- \$250 million to improve access to care for veterans residing in rural areas
- \$218 million to increase women veterans’ care
- In addition, \$50.6 billion was requested in Advanced Funding for FY 2012 (this includes expanding healthcare eligibility to some Category 7 & 8 veterans by 2013)

For DOD:

- \$30.9 billion for military medical care
- \$12 billion for military family support programs that include counseling and other services for families dealing with deployments, and childcare and youth programs
- \$250 million for PTSD, TBI, and mental health research and treatment programs

For DHS:

- \$4.6 billion to strength U.S. border security
- \$4 billion to bolster state and community emergency first responder programs
- \$1.6 billion to expeditiously identify and remove illegal aliens who commit crimes
- \$788 million to modernize transportation system security screening equipment and processes
- \$150 million to procure and deploy next-generation biological, radiological and nuclear detection equipment

To read the VFW national commander’s press release, with links to more information about the government FY 2011 budget submission, go to

<http://www.vfw.org/index.cfm?fa=news.newsDtl&did=5371>.

2. VFW Testifies on VA Budget: As one of four coauthors of the Independent Budget (IB), the VFW testified Thursday before the House VA Committee on the new FY 2011 VA budget proposal. The IB is now in its 24th year, and its recommendations capture the full picture of

what VA needs to care for veterans. VFW is responsible for the construction portion of the IB, and testimony centered on major and minor VA construction projects, to include a concern that ongoing funding is needed to complete the numerous projects under construction, as well as those being planned. View the recorded webcast on the House VA Committee website at <http://veterans.house.gov/>.

3. House VA Subcommittee Hearings: The FY 2011 budget submission was not the only topic of discussion among House VA Committee members this week.

- **The Subcommittee on Health** reviewed VA's Project HERO program, which is a pilot program designed to improve the purchasing of contract care for veterans who need a specialized service or who reside in extremely rural areas. VA currently spends more than \$2 billion annually on contracted care, but there is no consistent process. The committee had just recently learned VA was implementing more HERO pilot programs in VISNs 8, 16, 20 and 23. Subcommittee Chairman Michael Michaud (D-ME) stressed the need for more transparency, and asked VA provide improved access, quality and cost effective care, and to keep those in the veterans' community (mainly VSOs) informed and involved in the on-going process.
- **The Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs** discussed the status of the Veterans' Benefit Improvement Act (P.L. 110-389). VFW supported the passage of the legislation in 2008, as it provides provisions designed to modernize VA's claims processing system, to include expediting ready- to-rate claims and providing veterans a claims checklist to ease the paperwork process. The law also created the Disability Advisory Commission. Improving the claims process is a top legislative priority for VFW.

For more subcommittee information, visit the House VA Committee website at <http://veterans.house.gov/>.

4. Vietnam MIA Identified: The Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of Army Spec. Lawrence L. Aldrich of Fort Worth, Texas. On May 6, 1968, Aldrich was on a search-and-clear mission in South Vietnam's Binh Dinh Province. He was last seen engaged in a battle manning a M-60 machine gun position with two others. An air strike was called in, but one of the bombs inadvertently landed on Aldrich's position, killing all three. Their unit recovered remains of the other two, but Aldrich could not be found. In 1992, a local citizen took a joint U.S.-Vietnamese investigation team to a location where he thought the remains were buried, but an excavation revealed nothing. In 2006, Vietnamese officials unilaterally investigating the case interviewed two other villagers, who recalled finding the body of an American and burying it where it lay. A second joint investigation recommended another excavation, which occurred in March 2009. That excavation unearthed human remains and other non-biological evidence, which led to Aldrich's identification. He was buried Jan. 31 in his hometown of Fort Worth.