

November 30, 2017

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of America's service members, veterans and their families, we are greatly concerned that Congress has yet to fulfill its most fundamental obligation — pass annual appropriations bills to fund the federal government. To compound this problem, the use of a continuing resolution has been proposed. Every continuing resolution exacerbates the uncertainty of future operations for both the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DOD). We urge Congress to reach a budget deal, which includes full funding for VA and DOD to ensure both can perform their vital responsibilities.

A deal should include an agreement on the outdated Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) spending caps, which prevent VA's ability to move the Veterans Choice Program from a mandatory spending account to its discretionary community care account in fiscal year (FY) 2019, as the Committees on Veterans' Affairs and the undersigned organizations have proposed. VA has requested an additional \$4 billion to continue the Veterans Choice Program, and has indicated it would need similar amounts for FY 2019 to ensure veterans who are unable to receive readily available VA care have the opportunity to receive care in their communities.

Additionally, VA has made a commendable decision to adopt the same electronic health care record as DOD, which will enable seamless interoperability between DOD, VA, and community care providers. Estimated to cost \$16 billion over 10 years, the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM) effort will need funding in FY 2018 and FY 2019 to support the EHRM contract with Cerner, program management oversight, and infrastructure updates to ensure implementation stays on schedule and cost overruns do not occur.

Additionally, our armed services already face difficulties with reduced readiness, delayed maintenance and modernization, and cuts to quality of life programs. The lack of a timely, fully-funded defense budget hinders DOD's ability to properly plan for our country's defense, defeat our enemies abroad, and execute their most solemn duty — to bring home our missing.

Sequestration and draconian spending caps limit our nation's ability to provide service members, veterans, and their families the care and benefits they have earned and deserve. We call on Congress to pass full-year appropriations for DOD and VA, adjust BCA caps, and end sequestration to improve the health, welfare, and readiness of our service members, veterans, and their families.

Sincerely,



ROBERT E. WALLACE
Executive Director
VFW Washington Office



VERNA L. JONES
Executive Director
The American Legion

cc: The Honorable Michael Enzi, Chairman, Senate Committee on Budget
The Honorable Bernard Sanders, Ranking Member, Senate Committee Budget
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Diane Black, Chairman, House Committee on Budget
The Honorable John Yarmuth, Ranking Member, House Committee Budget
The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen, Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations