

VFW Applauds Reintroduction of Advance Funding Legislation

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is applauding the chairmen of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees for reintroducing advance funding legislation for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The VA has had to cope with far too many budgets that came too late to adequately meet the needs at hand," said Glen M. Gardner, Jr., a Vietnam veteran who leads the 2.2 million-member VFW and its Auxiliaries. "We applaud Senate VA Committee chairman Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) and House VA Committee chairman Bob Filner (D-Calif.) for reintroducing this legislation into the 111th Congress. It will greatly improve the quality of healthcare the VA provides for America's veterans."

The "Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009," which the two chairmen are scheduled to unveil at a Capitol Hill press conference today, will require Congress to approve a VA budget a full year ahead of time, instead of just for the upcoming fiscal year, as is the current practice.

The VA budget is one of 12 major spending packages that are on the congressional agenda every year, but despite being more than seven years into a war, the VA has only received one on-time budget in the past 12 years. Gardner calls this unacceptable, because late funding negatively impacts operations, and can lead to the reduction or elimination of vital programs, such as mental health and traumatic brain injury research and treatment, or recruitment programs for doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers.

"Advance funding does not diminish congressional oversight or the nature by which the discretionary funding process works," explained Gardner. "It just means Congress will prepare and appropriate the VA's healthcare budget a full year in advance, which is clearly a smarter and more efficient way for the nation's largest integrated healthcare system to conduct business."

Akaka and Filner introduced their original bills on Sept. 18, 2008, too far into the previous Congress to gain any traction, but one early cosponsor was then-Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), an endorsement that the VFW national commander hopes is taken into consideration as the

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new legislation heads to committee.

"The VA is in the service industry, and as such it must be funded differently than the rest of the federal government," said Gardner. "Advance funding will deliver a budget to the VA that is sufficient, timely and predictable, which will enable the VA to more properly and efficiently care for America's veterans past and present.

"The VFW salutes the two chairmen and their early cosponsors for their support, and we urge the entire Congress to get onboard this much needed legislation."