



VFW Against VA Collection Increase Proposal

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. wants the Obama administration to kill a controversial budget proposal that would bill veterans with private health insurance for the care they receive for their service-connected disabilities and wounds.

"It is unconscionable to pass along the costs of war to wounded and disabled veterans," said the VFW's Glen M. Gardner Jr., a Vietnam veteran from Round Rock, Texas. "This is one policy proposal that the VFW will work hard to defeat because it breaks a sacred trust that veterans have with their government."

The administration proposed Thursday that the Department of Veterans Affairs would receive \$55.9 billion in discretionary funding in fiscal year 2010, an amount that exceeds the current year budget by \$5.5 billion. Gardner said the proposal includes good initiatives, such as additional funding to enable more veterans to enroll into the VA system, to expand the concurrent receipt of disability compensation and retirement pay for medically-retired veterans, and to target access to care issues, especially for rural veterans. But the VFW national commander stopped short of applauding the budget when it was confirmed that VA would increase third party collections by billing for service-connected disability treatments.

Gardner said the administration's budget proposal for the VA will get a much closer examination once details are released in April, but he fears the collections increase could lead to higher insurance premiums, as well as make it more difficult for veterans and their families to obtain or retain private health insurance. It could also discourage civilian employers from hiring disabled veterans.

On Friday, the VFW and 10 other major veterans' and military organizations wrote President Obama to voice their objections to the budget proposal.

"The VFW adamantly opposes this proposal, and I am asking every VFW and auxiliary member, as well as every American, to urge their congressional delegations to block this move," said Gardner. "Charging veterans for the VA care they receive for service-connected disabilities and combat wounds is not how a grateful nation takes care of her warriors."

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