

VFW Says President is Keeping His Promise

Recent meeting confirms President Obama and VFW National Commander Richard Eubank share many of the same concerns

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. left the Oval Office yesterday knowing that President Obama shares his same concerns for properly caring for military veterans, servicemembers and their families, and for continued progress to account for 88,000 Americans still listed as missing-in-action since World War II.

"It was a very positive meeting and we're grateful for the opportunity," said Richard L. Eubank, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Eugene, Ore., who was in Washington for the VFW's annual legislative conference, which included presenting the organization's top legislative priorities before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on Tuesday.

Leading his list of concerns was the claims backlog, which the VFW is working with the VA to find a viable and achievable solution. "There is no quick-fix to a backlog that took years to create," said Eubank. "It will take a properly funded and coordinated information technology plan, coupled with staff increases and training, just to put a dent into the 1.5 million-claim backlog, yet the VFW remains hopeful that significant progress will be made and that the backlog will eventually be eliminated."

The VFW national commander also discussed the implementation of a caregiver bill that was supposed to have begun providing benefits at the end of January. "The VFW isn't advocating speed over quality, but we do insist the VA use clinical evaluations to implement

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the program fairly to seriously disabled veterans of all generations," he said.

Eubank used the opportunity with the president to praise the great military family support work of first lady Michelle Obama and second lady Dr. Jill Biden. "Our military is fully aware and sincerely appreciative of their outspoken support of military families. The VFW will continue to do whatever it can to support those who have singularly borne the brunt of almost 10 years of war."

Support for the families of America's MIAs was also a discussion topic, especially with the new congressional mandate for the Defense Department to begin identifying at least 200 missing servicemen by the year 2015, which is more than double their current average.

"We are very grateful for the large budget recommendations for the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command," said Eubank, who has witnessed the dedication of U.S. military and civilian employees to help recover missing Americans in Vietnam, Russia and elsewhere.

The funding increases will allow JPAC to further expand their worldwide mission to meet the new requirement, but the VFW is concerned that search and recovery efforts in Southeast Asia could take a backseat to other wars, where the opportunity to recover more MIAs with less effort may exist.

"After meeting with the president, I am proud to report that Southeast Asia operations will continue unabated, and that the future of the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs is secure," he said. "America has a sacred responsibility to care for her veterans, military and their families, and to ensure a fallen comrade is never left behind on the battlefield. The president is ensuring that promise is kept."