VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

Don't Balance Budget on Backs of Disabled Veterans and Military

VFW national commander testifies on veterans' behalf at the Legislative Conference

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WASHINGTON — In testimony today before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, the national commander of America's oldest and largest major combat veterans' organization urged Congress to not balance the budget on the backs of disabled veterans or on the men and women who continue to serve in uniform.

"Your two committees have a long history of taking care of veterans in a bipartisan manner," said Richard L. DeNoyer, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Middleton, Mass., who leads the 2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

"We understand that current budget realities are forcing very hard choices in Congress and in agencies and departments across the executive branch. I urge you all to remember in the coming days that Congress' first mandate is the protection of its citizens, which can only be accomplished if Congress first protects those who volunteer to protect our nation in uniform."

Today's congressional testimony caps the VFW's annual legislative conference in which 300 VFW leaders from around the country visited their elected officials to discuss issues important to veterans, service members and their families. Atop their legislative agenda this year was protecting the Department of Veterans Affairs budget from mandatory cuts should sequestration occur, and stopping Defense Department proposals that would reduce military pay, force military dependents and retirees to pay exponentially more for their Tricare health coverage, and to civilianize the current military retirement system.

Other high-interest topics range from military transition and assistance programs to Post 9/11 GI Bill improvements, the proper care and treatment of wounded warriors, women veterans, the 1.7 million VA claims workload and adjudication error rate, the VA rating

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schedule change that could have veterans with similar wounds compensated differently, and combating veteran suicides and homelessness, among others.

Other events during the week-long legislative conference include:

Presenting the VFW Congressional Award to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-Calif.) for fighting to strengthen the military and to invest in a force that can meet and beat any threat. He also led efforts to keep terrorist detainees off of U.S. soil, increased missile defense funding, restored the tradition of keeping nondefense social issues out of the defense bill, and is a leading voice to keep the military intact in this budget-cutting era.

Presenting the VFW Gold Medal and Citation to the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment, plus hosting more than 70 wounded warriors and their families to dinner at the National Press Club.

Awarding a $30,000 scholarship Sunday evening to Elizabeth Scannell from Goose Creek, S.C., the winner of the annual VFW Voice of Democracy program, a patriotic-themed contest that this year judged 50,000 high school student entries. She was joined by Lydia Macfarlan from Siloam Springs, Ark., who beat almost 125,000 other middle school students to win a $10,000 U.S. Savings Bond in the VFW’s annual Patriot’s Pen contest.

And receiving checks for $1 million from USAA Executive Vice President and retired Army Lt. Gen. Stephen Speakes, $450,000 from Burger King franchisee owner Mike DeRosa, and earlier, $450,000 from Sports Clips founder and CEO Gordon Logan. All donations will help the VFW and the VFW Foundation reinforce their nationwide support programs for military and veterans.

Watch Richard DeNoyer's testimony or click here to read his prepared testimony.