VFW Discusses Issues with President

Protecting VA budget and stopping negative DOD proposals lead agenda

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. met with President Obama this afternoon to discuss issues important to veterans, service members and their families. Topping the agenda was protecting the Department of Veterans Affairs from mandatory budget cuts should sequestration occur, and VFW opposition to certain Defense Department proposals that could jeopardize the continued existence of the all-volunteer force.

"The president has been consistent in word and action on protecting and increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs budget, and he pledged to continue to do so even in these tough budget times. We gratefully appreciate that commitment," said Richard L. DeNoyer, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Middleton, Mass., who leads the 2 million-member VFW and its Auxiliaries.

"The advocacy work he and First Lady Michelle, and Vice President Joe and Dr. Jill Biden, continue to do for our military and veteran families everywhere has been outstanding," he said, citing as examples the passage of advanced VA budget appropriations, the Family Caregiver Bill, and just this week, bringing financial relief to thousands of service members and veterans whose homes may have been wrongfully foreclosed upon since 2006.

Discussed with the president was the VFW's opposition to certain DOD proposals that would significantly raise healthcare fees on military families and retirees, and change the current military retirement system. DeNoyer also expressed his concern about the negative impact sequestration would have on overall force readiness and national security.

The VFW national commander said that ensuring the security of the nation is expensive, but

that cost pales in comparison to asking people to voluntarily do more for their country in a few short years than most Americans do in a lifetime.

"In my travels to Afghanistan, Europe, the Pacific and around the country, the number #1 issue from the troops is what the Pentagon is doing to their pay and benefits," said DeNoyer. "I am honored to carry their concerns to the Oval Office, because as the nation's largest and oldest major combat veterans' organization, one of the reasons why the VFW has maintained its relevancy for more than a century is we work hard to defeat any proposal that negatively impacts national security or the many people programs we fought equally hard to create within DOD and the VA."

Also addressed was the need for full funding of those organizations charged with returning missing Americans from current and previous wars and conflicts—the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, and the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs.

"The president fully agreed that there is no mission more sacred than to recover our fallen from the battlefield and return them home to their families," said DeNoyer. "The VFW is very comforted to hear that, because the upcoming renewal of recovery operations in North Korea is a new mission requirement that must come with additional funding so that all missing Americans from all wars and conflicts receive the same highest recovery priority," he said.

"I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to sit down and address these VFW issues with the president, and I look forward to discussing them further in the near future."