

# War Vets To Lobby Congress for Benefits

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**WASHINGTON** — More than a thousand war veterans will be in the halls of Congress next week to lobby their elected officials on issues important to the nation's 24 million veterans, 2.2 million servicemembers, and their families.

"We are not here to be ignored or appeased with vague promises," said George Lisicki, the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., the oldest major veterans' organization in the nation, and its largest organization of combat veterans.

"We are here to make sure that Congress fully understands that 'veterans matter,'" he said, "and if Congress can't afford to take care of veterans, then Congress should quit making them."

Lisicki, a Vietnam veteran from Carteret, N.J., will be joined in Washington by 1,200 VFW and Auxiliary leaders from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Europe, Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Along with a new GI Bill for the 21st century, he said other key VFW lobbying issues include an on-time, fully funded budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs, and a pledge that those in uniform and their families will be properly taken care of both on and off the battlefield.

"We have millions of veterans who are excluded from VA healthcare because their annual income exceeds \$28,000. We have a VA benefits system that takes a new claim six months to be reviewed because of an 890,000-claim backlog, and an appropriations process that hasn't produced an on-time VA budget this decade," he emphasized. "Add to that list the challenges faced daily by hundreds of thousands of servicemembers and their families who are physically and emotionally drained from almost seven years of war," he said.

"It is absolutely shameful that veterans have to fight through a difficult discretionary budget process every year in order to properly fund the VA and ensure the Defense Department takes care of its servicemembers and families and retirees," he said.

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The VFW is also very concerned with the safety and security of America's borders, so the veterans can be expected to address the impact of illegal immigration and the recently lapsed Protect America Act with their senators and representatives, as well.

"America's veterans are active participants in the political process of our country," said Lisicki. "That's why veterans' matter."

The VFW Community Service and Legislative Conference begins Sunday in the Omni Shoreham Hotel in northwest Washington. On Monday, guest speakers include VA Secretary James Peake, Army Surgeon General Eric Schoomaker, Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England, and Navy Rear Adm. Mark Buzby, the commander of the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In addition, Rep. Chet Edwards (D-TX) [[see related release](#)] will be presented the VFW Congressional Award in recognition of his support to veterans and military personnel and families, and the VFW News Media Award will be presented to CBS News correspondent Bob Schieffer for his journalistic integrity and highest of standards.

On Tuesday, the VFW national commander will testify on veterans' issues before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs. That hearing is set for 9:30 a.m. in room 216 of the Hart Senate Office Building.