Caregiver Legislation Becomes Law

Families, women veterans, rural veterans to benefit

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WASHINGTON — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is saluting the president for signing into law yesterday the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act (S. 1963), a bipartisan bill introduced last fall by Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii).

"This new law will go a long way to helping our injured Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families who care for them," said VFW National Commander Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis. "This new law honors the commitment our nation made to her veterans."

The new law will expand support programs for the family caregivers of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, as well as the family caregivers of all veterans, to include training and education assistance, counseling and mental health services, and respite care. It will improve the services VA currently provides to female veterans, such as establishing a childcare pilot program, providing seven days of post delivery care to newborns, and training mental health professionals who care for women veterans affected by military sexual trauma. It will also improve healthcare to veterans residing in rural areas, prohibit VA from collecting copayments from catastrophically injured veterans, and enhance homeless programs and initiatives.

"The new law recognizes and supports family caregivers who leave jobs and careers to care for their severely injured loved ones," said Tradewell. "It recognizes that women veterans must be served better by a VA that's geared primarily to treating men, and it addresses the challenges of serving veterans in rural parts of our country, as well as homeless veterans on the streets of our cities.

"As an early supporter of S. 1963, the VFW is proud to have worked with members of Congress and their staffs to make this new law happen, to include Chairman Akaka's seven Senate cosponsors — VA Committee ranking member Richard Burr (R-N.C.), Tim Johnson (D-S.D.), Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.), Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), James Inhofe (R-Okla.),

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Mark Begich (D-Alaska) and Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) — and House VA Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-Calif.) and House VA Health Subcommittee Chairman Michael Michaud (D-Maine)."