

VFW National Commander Urges Congress to, 'Do What is Right for America's Only True Heroes'

VFW pays visit to Capitol Hill to remind leaders of its high priority issues

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Richard L. Eubank, the national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., delivered testimony today before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees.

In his presentation of the VFW's national priorities, Eubank, a Marine Corps retiree and Vietnam combat veteran from Eugene, Ore., urged congressional members "to do what is right for America's only true heroes" by fully funding the VA, even as lawmakers wrestle with efforts to rein in federal spending. Eubank, who leads the nation's largest and oldest major combat veterans' organization, reminded committee members of the heavy burden placed on current service members, veterans and their families.

"There is a tremendous cost of war, most especially on those men and women who fight it. And that the consequences of defending America do not end when the last bullet is fired."

Eubank reiterated the legislative concerns of the veterans' service organization.

"Thousands dead, tens of thousands wounded, and hundreds of thousands more who came home to unemployment, broken families, and memories that will be there for the rest of their lives," he said. "Suicides are at record highs in the military and in the veteran's community. PTSD, TBI, substance abuse ... the list of ailments and challenges our veterans face is a long one, and it goes hand-in-hand with a decade of serving faithfully in two wars on the other side of the globe. In no uncertain terms, the VFW believes the aftermath of war on service members and their families must be recognized as a cost of war."

In his testimony, Eubank praised the VA healthcare system, but was critical of the Veterans

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Benefits Administration. “While the VA health care system is a 21st century health care system delivering world-class care to America’s veterans, the Veterans Benefits Administration continues to struggle with the greatest workload in over 50 years, and the worst quality in decades.”

Eubank explained that the current backlog of claims for compensation and pension, education, and those on appeal, currently sits at almost 1.5 million, and that the reported adjudication error rate of 16 percent is much higher for claims dealing with such as Traumatic Brain Injuries, PTSD and diabetes.

The VFW national commander thanked VA Secretary Eric Shinseki for his “courage and steadfastness” to add three new illnesses to the list of presumptive illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure. “His determination to do what was right for veterans has earned him our admiration and gratitude,” he said.

Other VFW high priority issues include the proper care and treatment of returning servicemen and women with severe injuries to mind and body, the need for an integrated information technology system, veterans’ unemployment and education, military caregivers and survivor benefits, and the need to sustain and enhance government search and recovery efforts for unaccounted-for Americans from all wars. Eubank also provided testimony regarding further traumatic brain injury research and treatments, suicide awareness and prevention, and women veterans' health care needs.

Joining Eubank at the hearing were hundreds of VFW and Ladies Auxiliary leaders from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Europe, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. It was followed by individual meetings between VFW members and their respective members of Congress.