

2014: The Year Ahead

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This year promises to be a momentous one for America's veterans and its warriors. Issues affecting those in and out of uniform will be on the front burner on Capitol Hill.

Two events in 2014 will no doubt put veterans and the armed forces in the national limelight: congressional elections and withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Afghanistan. The ending of a war is always a watershed in history, and this one should be no exception.

Achieving such a milestone will attract publicity that should be maximized to the benefit of the Afghanistan War's veterans and their families. While the media is focused on the political ramifications of the combat disengagement, we should draw attention to the needs of the youngest generation of war vets.

Recently, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told the 47,000 GIs remaining in Afghanistan: "I know more than occasionally you wonder if anybody's paying attention, or if anybody cares, but we do."

Hagel may have been speaking on behalf of the American people in general, but his words could have been our own. This is all part of our commitment to "fully support U.S. troops and their mission to prosecute the war on terrorism."

VFW's Priority Goals include a host of issues—health care, housing, education, employment, transition assistance and military quality-of-life as a whole—that are perfectly relevant to those on active duty today. Each and every one of these goals is being pursued with vigor by our Washington Office staff.

As politicians seek public office during the mid-term elections, these and other issues important to all veterans will take center stage. Adequate and timely funding for the VA budget, top-notch mental health services, reducing the disability claims backlog and protecting compensation are among them.

When votes are being courted is also the time when the prospect for a public hearing of veteran concerns is greatest. Mid-year up until Election Day will be the opportune time to get elected officials to pay attention. And it is at the grassroots level that you can make the biggest difference. Leverage your Post and Department membership in the quest to preserve

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veterans' rights. State legislatures are often an overlooked and neglected battleground.

2014 is important for another more personal reason. Fifty years ago in August, Congress took a step that had far-reaching consequences. With the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, it opened the door to a wider war for Americans.

So beginning that month we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the sacrifices made in Vietnam. To me and my fellow Vietnam vets—now the largest single segment of VFW membership—this is a date with genuine meaning.

Whether it be an anniversary commemoration, the highlighting of veterans issues in an election year or remembering the most recent generation of vets as they return home from Afghanistan—or a combination of all three—make 2014 a year worthy of your time.