

Congress Passes Emergency VA Funding Bill

Aug 01, 2014

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is relieved that Congress finally did what they were elected to do and passed an emergency funding bill at the last minute to help the Department of Veterans Affairs overcome a nationwide crisis in care and confidence. The House of Representatives on Wednesday passed H.R. 3230, the *Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014*, by a vote of 420-5, and on Thursday, the Senate did likewise, by a vote of 91-3. The bill now heads to the president for his signature.

"This legislation will help new VA Secretary Robert McDonald to fix what's broken, hold people accountable, and restore the faith that veterans must have in their VA," said VFW National Commander John W. Stroud, of Hawthorne, Nev. "The VFW salutes House VA Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.), Senate VA Committee Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), their staffs and supporters for making this happen."

The \$15 billion emergency funding bill expands access to non-VA health care facilities for veterans experiencing excessive appointment waiting times, or who reside 40 miles or more away from a VA medical facility; hires more doctors, nurses and other health care practitioners; adds 27 new or expanded VA outpatient clinics; enhances care for victims of Military Sexual Trauma and those suffering from Traumatic Brain Injuries; and provides in-state tuition rates for all Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients, regardless of residency requirements. The legislation also gives the VA secretary far more latitude in firing senior executives who fail in their primary mission of taking care of America's veterans.

"Holding people appropriately accountable is critical to mission accomplishment in both the public and private sector, which is why that same rule must also apply to the three senators and five congressmen who voted against H.R. 3230," said Stroud.

Voting against the legislation were Sens. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) and Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), and Reps. Rick Crawford (R-Ark.), Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), Walter Jones (R-N.C.), Mark Sanford (R-S.C.), and Steve Stockman (R-Texas). The hypocrisy of their "no" votes, according to the VFW national commander, is virtually all of them voted for hundreds of billions in supplemental war funding with little concern about corresponding offsets or oversight about how or where the money would be spent; and one was even the governor of a state that experienced tremendous active, Guard and Reserve deployments,

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as well as combat casualties.

“Our nation is still at war and those eight members failed to stand with wounded, ill and injured veterans,” said Stroud. “Failing to support America’s veterans is as reprehensible as it is disgusting, and I hope all veterans, service members, their families, and every voting constituent in every home district and state remembers that. I guarantee that the VFW will do our best to remind them.”