



AMERICA'S VETERANS

Congress Learns Of Veterans' Concerns

By James N. Goldsmith, Commander-in-Chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

(NAPSA)—Recently I had the opportunity to offer testimony to the Joint Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate.



Goldsmith

While a wide range of issues were addressed that day, there are a few I would like to touch on once again.

First, the VA's budget request for fiscal year (FY) 2003 is of chief concern.

Taken at face value, the budget provides for a significant increase, especially for veterans health care.

What is troubling is the fact that the President's budget relies heavily on passage of proposed legislation and collections from third-party users and does not accurately portray the need for direct appropriations.

The VFW is strongly opposed to a legislative proposal that would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to charge veterans a \$1,500 deductible when they seek care at a VA facility.

We contend that this is simply a way to increase the cash flow and discourage veterans from using the system. What the VA really needs to do is correct their problems in billing and collections, not charge veterans for services they are entitled to.

Second, it was communicated to the Committees that as the veteran population continues to increase in age, the VFW remains adamant that veterans have man-

dated access to the full continuum of VA health care services, including long-term care.

While the Veterans and Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act was passed two years ago, the regulations defining the method of delivery for long-term care, inpatient and home-and-community-based services have yet to be issued. It is up to the Committees to correct this deficiency.

Another issue addressed that day was our position that veterans deserve and have earned an employment service that is dedicated exclusively to them and that offers training and employment geared to our 21st century economy.

In addition, a healthy veterans employment and training program is an essential component of a successful veterans homeless program. Estimates show that on any given night more than 275,000 veterans are homeless. Nearly half that figure suffer from mental or substance abuse problems.

While we applaud the passing of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act, this Act cannot be implemented without funding. We urged the Committees to bring this legislation to life by authorizing the necessary funding.

By the same token, I want to urge our members, both as individuals and as members of VFW, to let their elected officials know their opinion on these and other important issues of the day.

James N. Goldsmith of Lapeer, Michigan was elected Commander-in-Chief of the organization on August 24, 2001.

For a free brochure about becoming a member of the VFW write: Veterans of Foreign Wars, National Headquarters, Membership, Broadway at 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111.