



DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

807 Maine Ave., SW ■ Washington, D.C. 20024-2410 ■ Phone (202) 554-3501 ■ Fax (202) 554-3581

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

February 2012

DAV Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, DC

Several hundred DAV members at the 2012 Mid-Winter Conference participated with our National Commander and other senior DAV leaders during a hearing before a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees on February 28, and visited with Members of the House and Senate during their week in Washington. At our Benefits Protection Team workshop we was addressed by the Hon. Jeff Miller, Chairman of the Veterans Affairs' Committee in the House. We have placed our members' recommended "talking points" on our website, at <http://www.dav.org/news/documents/2012TalkingPoints.pdf>, for the information of DAV members at large. We ask that you meet with your Congressional Representatives in their districts and states to impress upon them the importance of these issues to you, their constituents, and to all veterans. During our Mid-Winter Conference, National Commander Donald L. Samuels presented the DAV's prestigious "Going to Bat for Veterans" award to Chairman Miller and Chairman Patty Murray of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Appropriations and Deficit Reduction

As we indicated in the December 2011 Bulletin, the enforcement mechanisms contained in Public Law 112-25 will trigger automatic across-the-board cuts in federal departments and agencies resulting in a \$1.2 trillion reduction in federal spending over the next ten years.

Based on our interpretation of Public Law 112-25 and prior budget laws, and after consultation with outside budget experts, we believe that VA health care and benefits programs will be exempt from any automatic budget cuts. To eliminate any possibility of a different interpretation, Chairman Miller has introduced a bill to explicitly exempt VA from any sequestration of appropriated funds. A similar bill was introduced in the Senate by Sen. John Tester. We strongly support these bills.

On Friday, December 16, 2011, the House passed H.R. 2055, the Fiscal Year 2012 Military Construction-VA Appropriations bill. This measure served as the vehicle for a "Megabus" appropriations bill (the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012), which included all the pending appropriations bills. On Saturday, December 17, the Senate passed the bill and sent it to the President. The President approved this bill on December 23, as Public Law 112-74. This bill provides full-year funding for all VA programs for Fiscal Year 2012.

Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Proposal

With the 2012 appropriations work now completed, we turn our attention to the FY 2013 budget for VA benefits and services, proposed by the President on February 13, 2012.

The budget request includes funding increases for VA health care and benefits programs. In light of tight budgetary constraints government-wide, DAV is pleased with these increases, but some concerns remain.

Medical Care: The Administration requested \$55.7 billion, an amount that presumes a downward trend for medical care first- and third-party collections of \$3.0 billion. Alternatively the *Independent Budget* recommends \$57.2 billion for these accounts, an increase of \$3.3 billion above the FY 2012 enacted appropriations level, and \$1.5 billion higher than the Administration's request.

Medical and Prosthetic Research: The Administration requested \$583 million, an increase of \$1.7 million from the current year. The IB recommended \$611 million to cover biomedical research inflation, to continue currently-funded research projects, and to allow VA to develop new treatments for the unique injuries, illnesses and diseases prevalent in veterans.

Benefits Processing: The \$2.2 billion budget request for the FY 2013 activities of the Veterans Benefits Administration is \$145 million more than the current level and \$54 million more than the IB recommendation for that period. However, the request falls short on funding for of the IB-recommended staffing level of 585 for the Board of Veterans Appeals and an additional 195 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment counselors.

Major and Minor Construction: Contrasted to the IB's recommendations, the Administration is requesting \$2.2 billion less for Major Construction and \$461 million less for Minor Construction. This continued underfunding trend is deeply concerning to DAV. The Administration requested \$532 million and \$604 million for Major and Minor Construction, respectively.

Operational Improvements: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has reported that VA had reduced its FY 2012 and FY 2013 budget requests by more than \$3.4 billion due to gimmicks and unreasonable assumptions not relevant to the actual needs of sick and disabled veterans.

VA reported in this budget a carryover amount of \$500 million from FY 2012. This trend greatly concerns DAV because we continually receive reports from our members and from VA personnel of widespread funding shortages in the health care system.

Finally, the FY 2013 budget proposal includes a request for \$54.6 billion in advance appropriations for VA health care accounts in FY 2014, a 3.3% increase, not including medical collections.

VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011

As indicated in our prior bulletin, Congress approved the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 on November 16, 2011, and the President approved the bill on November 21, 2011.

The House VA Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held the first oversight hearing on this new veterans-employment law on December 15, 2011, to receive testimony from VA and DOL witnesses (<http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/reviewing-the-implementation-of-the-vow-to-hire-heroes-act-of-2011>). We are hopeful the Administration will place implementation of this important new employment and training law as a high-priority objective.

Pending Legislation

H.R. 3438 would require the Department of Defense (DoD) to meet the annual goal outlined under the Small Business Act for participation in federal procurement contracts by businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans. This bill is fully consistent with the intent of DAV Resolution No. 215.

H.R. 3612, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2011, would clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam. The DAV supports this bill, consistent with Resolution No. 014.

H.R. 3687, to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for coverage under the beneficiary travel program of the VA of certain disabled veterans for travel for certain special disabilities rehabilitation. This is in accordance with Resolution No. 199.

H.R. 4072, the Consolidating Veteran Employment Services for Improved Performance Act of 2012, would transfer all veteran employment functions from the Department of Labor to the VA.

S. 1631 would authorize the establishment in the VA of a center for technical assistance to private health care providers who furnish care to veterans in rural areas. The DAV supports this legislation in relation to DAV Resolution No. 203.

Hearings

All DAV testimony can be read in full on our DAV website, at:
<http://www.dav.org/voters/Testimony.aspx>.

On January 24, 2012, DAV testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs regarding the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities.

On February 15, 2012, DAV testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee concerning the FY 2013 budget.

On February 16, 2012, DAV testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs on the FY 2013 budget for compensation, pension and memorial affairs, and other benefits programs.

On February 28, DAV testified before a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, presenting the DAV's legislative agenda for the year.

On February 29, DAV testified before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on the FY 2013 budget.

Virtual Town Hall with Senator Patty Murray

On February 9, 2012, DAV hosted a national, virtual Town Hall meeting featuring Chairman Patty Murray of the Senate Committee on Veteran's Affairs. More than 3,000 Facebook users viewed or sent in questions to Sen. Murray during that live session. Questions covered a wide range of issues, from women's health, to mental health, access, delays in compensation awards and other highly relevant concerns of our members. So that your voices can continue to be heard, we plan to hold a succession of these Town Halls featuring important Members of Congress as well as VA officials. We encourage all our members to participate. Information about these events will be posted on our website, www.dav.org and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TheDAV and Twitter www.twitter.com/DAVHQ.

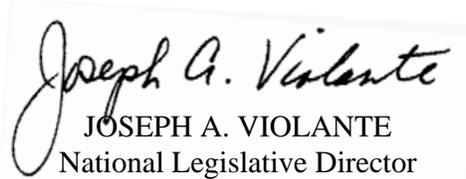
New Web Content Weekly

Beginning in October 2011, the DAV legislative staff began adding content weekly on subjects of interest to members. Some will require action from our DAV Commander's Action Network (CAN) and others will be used to keep you informed of progress on various issues before Congress and the Administration. Please check <http://capwiz.com/dav/home/> regularly to stay informed on legislative issues and actions.

Conclusion

To ensure the successful enactment of the legislation that we support, our DAV and Auxiliary members must become active members of DAV's grassroots—DAV CAN—and all of us must do our part to let our elected officials know about our support for legislation that builds better lives for our nation's service-disabled veterans, their families and their survivors. Please make a pledge to redouble your efforts to communicate our concerns to your elected officials. Your efforts and actions are a key to our success.

Thank you for again for your continuing support for DAV's programs of service.



JOSEPH A. VIOLANTE
National Legislative Director

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