

ISSUE BRIEF: ENDING THE BUDGET DELAYS

SITUATION

- While advance appropriations for VA health care has been a tremendous success for shielding veterans' hospitals and clinics from political budget fights and late budgets, it needs to be extended to all remaining VA discretionary and mandatory programs.
- There are still parts of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), including information technology, research and construction, which do not receive advance appropriation. The same is true for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), National Cemetery Administration and all mandatory veterans benefit payments.
- Our veterans deserve a system that ensures that all VA services have timely, predictable funding in an era where sequesters, continuing resolutions and threats of government shutdowns are all too frequent.
- America's veterans should not be held responsible for Washington's inability to reach an agreement on how to cut spending. It's time to take veterans out of politics.

IMPACT

- Imagine trying to run a large business or organization without knowing what level of funding you will receive each year or when it will arrive. This is the unfortunate challenge Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials have faced now 23 out of the past 26 years when Congress has failed to pass a budget on time.
- Late budgets impact VA's ability to plan for key investments in information technology, construction of new clinics and needed renovations and claims processing – all of which are important in ensuring we keep our promise to those who served.
- During last year's government shutdown, critical services for veterans were delayed, disrupted and suspended. Work was stopped on more than 250,000 VA disability claims awaiting appeals, burials at national cemeteries were scaled back and vital medical and prosthetic research projects were threatened. Had the shutdown continued for just a couple more weeks, even mandatory obligations of the federal government, including disability compensation and pension payments to veterans and their survivors, would have stopped.

SOLUTION

- There is common sense legislation pending in Congress that would insulate VA and veterans from the harmful effects of future shutdowns or temporary continuing resolutions.
- The Putting Veterans Funding First Act of 2013 (H.R. 813, S. 932) is bipartisan legislation that could extend advance appropriations to all VA programs. It would make it easier for VA to plan for key investments in information technology, claims processing and construction projects, and give Congress greater oversight on multi-year funding proposals.