RESOLUTION NO. 238

STRENGTHEN, REFORM AND SUSTAIN THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

WHEREAS, this nation’s highest obligation is to the men and women who were put in harm’s way in its defense, and become wounded, injured and ill as a consequence of that service; and

WHEREAS, America’s veterans have earned and deserve high-quality, comprehensive, and veteran-focused health care designed to meet their unique circumstances and needs; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system was established to provide for the needs of wounded, injured and ill war veterans, and is authorized by Congress to provide a full continuum of care, including extensive preventive programs, comprehensive primary, acute and rehabilitative care including pharmaceutical, mental health and readjustment counseling services; and

WHEREAS, VA facilities are affiliated with 152 medical schools for physician education and 40 other health professions represented through affiliations agreements with more than 1,800 colleges and universities, and annually train over 60,000 medical students and residents—about 70 percent of all physicians in the United States—more than 20,000 nurses and in excess of 30,000 other health professionals; and

WHEREAS, VA’s biomedical research and development programs have established new treatments and models of care tailored to the needs of disabled veterans, including a vast array of prosthetic, orthotic and other assistive devices, and elevates the standard of care for all Americans; and

WHEREAS, over the past 20 years, the VA health care system has vastly improved and expanded into an integrated environment that is uniquely qualified to treat service-related conditions of injured and ill veterans offering holistic, integrated, team-based care, a model of care that is rarely available in the private sector; and

WHEREAS, it is well documented in numerous studies of the VA health care system and the quality of care it delivers to millions of veterans, that while it faces many challenges, it continues to outperform the U.S. health care system on nearly every quality of care metric, and this unique accomplishment must not be compromised; and

WHEREAS, veterans who use the VA health care system have repeatedly indicated their overall preference for and satisfaction with the care they receive, notwithstanding existing problems that VA must overcome; and

WHEREAS, an independent assessment of the VA health care system found that the primary cause of access problems was a “misalignment” between the resources provided to VA, the growing demand for care by veterans, and complex rules to purchase the best-valued care in the community for veterans; and

WHEREAS, the capacity of VA to purchase community care is constrained by appropriated funding, and without a funding mechanism separate from funds for VA to directly provide care, such a lack of transparency could diminish and erode the VA health care system and endanger first-priority care to service-connected veterans; and
WHEREAS, the complex legislative authority, decentralized structure and inadequate funding to local VA facilities to purchase care in the community continue to erode the effectiveness of this necessary tool; and

WHEREAS, VA’s antiquated and cumbersome information technology infrastructure used to manage the authorization, claims processing and reimbursement for services acquired in the community is a disincentive for private providers to care for service-connected disabled veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA must implement a long-term strategy to rebuild, modernize, maintain and expand facilities, provide additional resources to maintain sufficient staffing levels, eliminate disparities in treatment, and improve information technology necessary for the care and treatment of injured and ill veterans; and

WHEREAS, VA must restructure all its community care programs into flexible and responsive integrated networks to deliver high value quality care; and

WHEREAS, VA must realign and expand availability of health care services to meet the diverse needs of future veterans, including women veterans and veterans who reside in rural and remote regions far from VA facilities; and

WHEREAS, VA must reform its management by increasing efficiency, transparency, and accountability to become more veteran-centric and responsive as an organization; NOW

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the DAV in National Convention, assembled in Atlanta, Georgia, July 31-August 3, 2016, believes the nation must continue to honor the service and sacrifices of our nation’s ill and injured veterans by strengthening, reforming and sustaining a modern, high-quality, accessible and accountable VA health care system; AND

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that in order to provide timely and convenient access to enrolled veterans, the VA health care system must evolve by creating integrated networks with high quality community providers where needed, including the Department of Defense and academic affiliates, with VA acting as the network coordinator and principal provider to ensure integrated, high quality, comprehensive, and veteran-focused health care; AND

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that DAV calls on Congress and the Administration to provide transparent, adequate and timely resources to the VA health care system to meet the continuing demand for care by ill and injured veterans in order to fulfill our promises to the men and women who served; AND

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that DAV will oppose any recommendation or proposal that could lead to weakening, diminishing or dismantling of the VA health care system that millions of veterans have chosen and rely upon, or that would weaken VA research or training programs.