Mid-Year Legislative Update

June 26, 2020
Legislative Department
Joy Ilem
National Legislative Director
MID-YEAR LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

• VA Secretary Wilkie provides a weekly COVID-19 briefing for VSOs—including VHA, VBA and NCA news
• VA starting to hold virtual events and meetings—PREVENTS roll out on June 17, Women Veterans Event on June 23
• Congress is functioning—resuming regular order of business and conducting hybrid-virtual hearings and roundtables
• Several hearings held on VA’s response to pandemic
• Three House Veterans’ Affairs hearings planned for July
MID-YEAR LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

• July 1, House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health—”Veterans’ Access to Reproductive Health Care”
• July 16, House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Disability and Memorial Affairs—legislative hearing on 8 Bills
• July 22, House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation—“Safety for All: Ending Sexual Harassment in the Department of Veterans Affairs.”
• House VA/Mil Con VA Appropriations Subcommittee will be marking up VA appropriations bill in July
VA COVID-19 RESPONSE
Veterans Health Administration

• Hired and on-boarded more than 16,000 new health care staff
• Beds available to treat both veterans with COVID-19 and others with emergency care needs throughout the shutdown
• VHA transitioned to telehealth services at the start of the pandemic
• Veterans Video Connect visits increased by 1,000 percent since the shutdown began; remote access points available at selected retailers such as Walgreens and Walmart.
• DAV testified on June 23, before HVAC on VA’s response to pandemic and use of telehealth services
VA COVID-19 RESPONSE
Veterans Health Administration (cont.)

• VA has begun a phased reopening of its medical facilities—dependent upon local conditions—see VHA websites for details on reopening of individual facilities and established protocols
• VA reported it was seeing approximately 300,000 veterans per day pre-pandemic/dropped to around 100,000/now back to 300,000 daily
• Up to 40,000 pending authorizations for veterans care
VA COVID-19 RESPONSE
Veterans Health Administration (cont.)

• VHA is currently amassing stores of personal protective equipment to ensure greater access in the event of future emergencies
• VA is modernizing its supply chain management consistent with DoD approach
• VHA continues to provide assistance to State Veterans Homes and community nursing homes
UPDATE ON CAREGIVER EXPANSION

- VA has hired about 85% of the personnel required for 1st phase of expansion
- IT program continues to progress
- VA expects it will be able to ask for IT certification—late summer or fall
- Proposed Regulations are still being reviewed—VA expects it to release final rules same time frame
VA COVID-19 RESPONSE
National Cemetery Administration

• Interment and limited visitation continued throughout the pandemic.
• Committal and memorial services resumed at all but 2 National Cemeteries on June 9.
• Rescheduling committal and memorial services that had to be postponed due to shutdowns beginning July 1.
VHA Update

Marquis Barefield
Assistant National Legislative Director
Update on COVID-19 Relief Packages for VHA

H.R. 6800, HEROES Act, passed the House of Representatives on May 15th and has been received in the Senate and placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar:

• Prohibition on copayments and cost sharing for veterans receiving preventative services relating to COVID-19
• Emergency treatment for veterans during COVID-19
• HUD–VASH Program
• Provision of Department of Veterans Affairs Hospital Care and Medical Services to certain veterans who are unemployed or lost employer-sponsored health care coverage by reason of a covered public health emergency
Coalition Letter released on June 3, 2020 to the HVAC and SVAC

Additional recommendation on top of what has already been considered as part of the HEROES Act, H.R. 6800:

- Hazard Pay for front-line workers
- CHAMPVA telehealth services
- CHAMPVA for adult children of veterans
- Inpatient copayments

On June 24, 2020, FCC Commissioners Unanimously Agree: House Should Swiftly Pass Gardner’s 9-8-8 Suicide Hotline Bill to Save Lives
PREVENTS TASK FORCE

• Established through Executive Order signed March 5, 2019
• DAV National Commander Butch Whitehead serves as a Program Ambassador
• Chaired by VA Secretary Robert Wilkie and White House Domestic Policy Chair Brooke Rollins
• DAV participated in White House PREVENTS Launch Event and Virtual Round Table
PREVENTS PLAN ROADMAP

The “Roadmap” is Nationwide Plan to End Suicides Among Veterans and all Americans

• Identifies a coordinated government-wide response
• Promotes cultural change—all Americans to sign a pledge
• Works with identified partners within the community
• Provides for additional research into effective prevention methods
VBA Update

Shane Liermann
Deputy National Legislative Director for Benefits
Update on COVID-19 Relief Packages for VBA

On April 28, the President signed into law H.R. 6322, the Student Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-140). This law provides many benefits, including:

- Allows student veterans that are in work-study programs to continue to receive payments during this time even if they are unable to work due to COVID-19.
- Makes certain veterans can receive additional housing allowance payments if their institution closes due to COVID-19.
- Allows student veterans to have their education entitlements restored or extended if campuses are closed due to COVID-19.
H.R. 6800—HEROES Act, passed the House of Representatives on May 15th and has been received in the Senate and placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar.

- Temporary increase for Aid and Attendance
- Defer all veteran and survivor debt collections (H.R. 6590)
- Tolling of deadlines
- Provides additional direct payments of up to $1,200 per individual and will automatically include veterans and survivors non-filers
On June 5th, H.R. 7010, the Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020, was signed by the President and became law.

H.R. 7105, to provide flexibility for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in caring for homeless veterans during a covered public health emergency, and for other purposes.

H.R. 7111/S. 3899, To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a retraining assistance program for unemployed veterans, and for other purposes.
VA COVID-19 RESPONSE
Veterans Benefits Administration

• Many sites have reopened for in-person Compensation and Pension examinations

• Now available in about 38 sites (check Regional Office sites for more information)

• About half of Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) and Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) sites have reopened
Vision for Veterans

Peter Dickinson
Senior Executive Advisor
Vision for Veterans Campaign

• Share DAV policy priorities with all federal candidates and officeholders

• Provides both principles and concrete action items for each issue

• Seek written campaign promises

• Infuse DAV policy priorities into national campaigns & party platforms
Setting Meetings with Candidates

- Department Commanders, Adjutants & BPTLs develop outreach plans that are appropriate for each state

- Meetings can be in person, if appropriate, via virtual web-based platforms (Zoom, Skype, etc.) or by phone

- Many States Still In Primary Campaign Phase, So May Be Necessary to Wait Until After Primaries

- Ask Incumbent’s Congressional Office, Contact County or State Political Parties, Check Campaign Websites and Search Internet for Campaign Contacts
Conducting Candidate Meetings

- Use Sample Meeting Request from DAV and Be Sure to Email or Deliver *Vision for Veterans* Package Before Meeting

- Provide Overview of DAV, Present *Vision for Veterans* and Seek Commitments – in Writing – for Action Items

- Follow Up with Thank You Message & Report Meeting Results Back to DAV Legislative Team with Feedback Form
Introducing Quorum

Jeremy Villanueva
Assistant National Legislative Director
Updates:

1. A brand new interactive home page
2. Personalized interface
3. My Officials Page
4. Better Alerts page
5. Legislative Updates
6. ...Stay Tuned!
Conclusion

Shane Liermann
Deputy National Legislative Director for Benefits
QUESTIONS???