Challenges to the VA Health Care and Benefits Systems
2014 – A Dramatic Year for VA

- Waiting List Scandal
- Health Care Access Crisis
- Management & Accountability

- Changes in VA Leadership
- Expanded Access Inside VA
- New, BUT Temporary Non-VA Options
What Caused Access Crisis?

You can’t fix a problem if you don’t understand what caused it

• Not enough doctors, nurses and clinicians
• Not enough useable treatment space
• NOT ENOUGH FUNDING
DAV Warned VA & Congress for Years

Waiting lists and access problems are not new

- PTF (2003): “mismatch in VA between demand for access and available funding”

- Sec. Principi (2004): “I asked OMB for $1.2 billion more than I received”

- Sec. Nicholson (2005): Forced to ask Congress for $1 billion more for FY 2005 and $2 billion more for FY 2006 than budget request
DAV Warned VA & Congress for Years

Insufficient budget requests & appropriations

• Funding for VA medical care was $7.8 billion LESS than what DAV and Independent Budget recommended over ten years

• Funding for infrastructure – major medical construction – was $9 billion LESS than what DAV and the Independent Budget recommended over ten years
What Caused Access Crisis

In 1905, American philosopher and writer George Santayana famously wrote that:

“...those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
DAV Principles To Address Crisis

• “...no veteran who is eligible for VA health care should be forced to wait too long or travel too far to get medical treatment and services they have earned…”

• “...ensure that all veterans currently waiting for treatment ...are provided access to timely, convenient health care as quickly as medically indicated.”

• “...VA must be involved in the timely coordination of and fully responsible for the payment for all authorized non-VA care.”

• “...protect, preserve and strengthen the VA health care system so it remains capable of providing a full continuum of high-quality, timely health care to all enrolled veterans.”
Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act (P.L. 113-146)

Temporary, 3-year program for an additional non-VA care option – “Choice” cards

• Veterans waiting more than 30 days

• Veterans living 40+ miles from VA facility

• Private providers must make VA agreement

• Private providers must accept Medicare rates
DAV Warned Congress About Concerns with “Choice” Act

- May Create False Expectations for Veterans
  - Lack of Private Providers to Accept Referrals

- May Fracture Veterans Care
  - Continuity of Care and Medical Records

- Implementation Problems
  - Law’s Definition of “40 miles”
  - Administrative and Financial Hurdles
  - Approval Process Confusion
What’s Next for VA Health Care

• Law created a temporary program, but—
  • *Some now propose to expand it, make it permanent and much more...*

• Restrict Enrollment to Combat Veterans

• Limit VA Services to Specialty Care Directly Related to Combat Injuries

• Phase Out VA Health Care and Replace with Vouchers for Private Sector Care
False Arguments

“Private health care is better than the VA”

NO, VA is best health care system for veterans

• Continuum of care, preventative health care
• VA is world leader in treating wounds of war
• VA treats the whole veteran and has an integrated system of care and benefits
• Numerous independent studies praise VA health care quality and safety
False Arguments

“Private health care costs less than VA care”

NO, VA is less expensive & better value

- Lower cost per enrollee than other systems
- Individual service costs not indicative
- VA patients are older, sicker, more disabled
- VA spends more time, treats whole body
- VA system includes research, medical training, national emergency system for DOD, DHS
False Arguments

“Veterans Want More Choices”

Of course they do, who doesn’t, but at what cost?

• Will Congress fund both a VA system and a “Choice” program for all veterans?

• Will more “choices” outside VA mean fewer “choices” inside VA?

• Do veterans deserve the right to get all care from VA, and will VA remain a “choice”?
VA Benefits Under Attack Today

WALL STREET JOURNAL  (October 27, 2014)
“VA Disability Claims Soar”
“Some See Higher Fraud Risk as More Vets Seek Compensation, Overloading Doctors”

Associated Press  (November 1, 2014)
“Senator Questions System Allowing 'Triple Dipping' Veterans”

Los Angeles Times  (November 16, 2014)
“Disability system for veterans strays far from its official purpose”
What You Can Do

• Tell Congress that veterans want a strong, robust VA health care system to remain a viable option for veterans who “choose” or rely on VA for all or most of their care.

• Tell Congress that veterans have earned their benefits through service and sacrifice and those promises must be kept.

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