



House Committee on Veterans' Affairs



Note From Chairman Bob Filner

Celebrating the Independence Won by Our Veterans

This Independence Day, I hope that Americans everywhere can take the time to say thank you to someone who has worn the uniform in service to our country. It is important to remember and observe the sacrifices given in order that we can live this day, and every day, in freedom.

It is the solemn duty of this Committee—and all Americans alike—to properly honor those who have fought to preserve the essential freedom and liberty that we value so dearly. The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs works hard every day to ensure that the contributions of our brave veterans are never forgotten.

Bob Filner

Ways To Empower our Nation's Veterans This Independence Day

- ◆ Remind veterans in your district to sign up for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill that goes into effect on August 1
- ◆ Reprint this report with a personal note and send to your constituents and local veteran service organizations
- ◆ Hold a town hall meeting to better understand the needs of your local veterans
- ◆ Conduct a briefing with local reporters to discuss issues important to veterans in your district
- ◆ Visit a local VA hospital or outpatient clinic that serves your veteran constituents
- ◆ Encourage your constituents to support military families and veterans in your district
- ◆ Model a public service effort to help those in need



• <http://veterans.house.gov> •

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Funding Worthy of Our Veterans

H.R. 1016 – Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009

- ◆ H.R. 1016 is a historic bill to allow Congress to fund VA medical accounts one year ahead of schedule. Over the last 22 years, 19 VA budgets have been passed late. This bill represents a new approach to providing adequate and timely funding for veterans' health care. This landmark legislation is the top priority for veteran service organizations.

FY 2010 Military Construction/VA Appropriations

- ◆ The House will consider the VA appropriations bill in July. Most notably, this bill will provide for advance appropriations for fiscal year 2010 and 2011 to ensure timely and predictable funding for the veterans health care system.
- ◆ The House Committee on Appropriations has approved a funding bill that provides a path to restoring and revitalizing the services provided to veterans by adding \$14.5 billion above fiscal year 2009. The bill includes the largest veterans funding increase ever requested by a President!

Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-32)

- ◆ This new law expands the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to cover the full cost of college for surviving military children. The provision creates the "Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry" scholarship to provide education benefits to children of deceased active duty service members.

FY 2010 Budget Resolution

- ◆ The Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Resolution (S.Con.Res. 13) was approved on April 29, 2009, and provides authorization for a \$5.6 billion increase over fiscal year 2009, an increase of 11.7% for veterans' health care and other programs. This budget increase builds upon the success of the 110th Congress when Democrats added \$16.3 billion to the VA budget.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5)

- ◆ Congressional approval of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is the first major step in rebuilding our country's economy, while also honoring our veterans.
- ◆ The bill provides a \$1.4 billion increase for the Department of Veterans Affairs for maintenance at VA medical facilities, construction of veterans' extended care facilities, and veteran cemetery repairs. The bill also provides economic stimulus payments of \$250 to disabled veterans receiving VA compensation or pension, which are currently being dispersed.



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VA Oversight: Solutions for Veterans & Accountability for Americans

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs conducted rigorous oversight of various VA operations to improve services for veterans, as well as provide accountability for the American taxpayer. The Committee has held a series of oversight hearings to measure program results, end waste, and combat mismanagement.

- ◆ The Committee continues to monitor VA's planning and progress in implementing the new G.I. Bill requirements that go into effect on August 1, 2009.
- ◆ The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a series of meetings and conducted a hearing to evaluate endoscopy procedures at the VA, after receiving reports of improper cleaning and incorrect usage of reusable medical equipment. The Subcommittee is committed to ensuring the problem is corrected, making certain that exposed veterans receive the care they need, and continuing to investigate the extent to which veterans were exposed to contaminated equipment while undergoing routine procedures.
- ◆ The Committee will hold a hearing to investigate recent allegations of improper cancer treatments at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center. The Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee will review current safety standards and enforcement procedures of the Nuclear Medicine Program at the VA.



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HVAC Preview

- ◆ **ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF CAREGIVERS:** Recent findings show gaps in VA's supportive services available to family caregivers of sick and wounded veterans. They include concerns about the lack of coordination of caregiver benefits when the service member transitions to veteran status. The Committee is working on legislation that would establish a family caregiver program for veterans seriously injured while on active duty.
- ◆ **G.I. BILL IMPLEMENTATION:** The Committee continues to closely monitor VA reports that it continues to meet key milestones necessary for administering the new educational benefits as a result of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which go into effect on August 1, 2009.
- ◆ **ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS:** The Committee will hold a series of hearings and meetings to examine the progress being made by the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs in ensuring electronic health record interoperability. President Obama ordered the DoD and the VA to work together to define and build a Joint Virtual Lifetime Electronic record that will ultimately contain administrative and medical information from the day an individual enters military service throughout their military career, and into the veteran phase of life. This information sharing is a matter of life and death for our veterans and the Committee is eager to ensure this "talk" is partnered with ACTION.
- ◆ **ADDRESS THE CLAIMS BACKLOG:** The Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs has held a series of hearings on the disability claims processing system. The Subcommittee continues to work with veterans, veteran service organizations, and other interested stakeholders to find innovative ways to streamline the claims processing system and deal with the increasing backlog of veteran claims. Findings from the hearings and witness testimony will provide the foundation for comprehensive legislation to further tackle the claims backlog that stymies our wounded veterans from receiving the benefits they earned and deserve.
- ◆ **IMPROVE INSURANCE FOR VETERANS AND SURVIVORS:** The Committee will take up the insurance-related needs of veterans and their families with legislation to ensure they receive the full measure of the benefit. The legislation will allow veterans to make the necessary plans to ensure future financial security for their loved ones.
- ◆ **STRENGTHEN VA RESEARCH:** The Committee will advance legislation to help nonprofit research and education corporations (NPCs) meet their full potential in supporting VA research and education, which in turn results in improved treatments and high quality care for our nation's veterans. The bill is in response to a Government Accountability Office report that details recommendations that would support the NPCs that partner with the VA to conduct research and education at VA medical centers.



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Important Veterans' Legislation Passed by the House of Representatives

Bills to Improve Health Care:

H.R. 1016 – Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009

H.R. 1016 is a landmark bill to respond to years of chronic underfunding of VA medical care. The bill would allow funding for the VA health care budget one year in advance using the advance appropriations process. This change would supply timely and predictable funding to ensure the highest quality of health care for veterans.

H.R. 1211 – Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act

This bill would expand and improve VA health care services for the 1.8 million women who have bravely served our country. H.R. 1211 would especially focus on the health care needs of those serving in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The bill requires the VA to provide medical care for newborn children of women veterans, establish a pilot program for child care services, and enhance programs available to veterans suffering from military sexual trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

H.R. 1171 – Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2009

H.R. 1171 is an important step to ensuring that the VA is prepared to provide comprehensive services to prevent veteran homelessness. This bill reauthorizes the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program through 2014 and includes an additional \$10 million to provide dedicated services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children. Grants are available to provide job training, counseling, placement services, and child care services to expedite the reintegration of veterans into the labor force.

Bills to Improve Benefits for Veterans:

H.R. 2990 – The Disabled Military Retiree Relief Act

In a step to fulfill President Obama's initiative, the House passed a bill to allow disabled military retirees with less than 20 years of service to receive both their military retirement and VA disability pay. This one-year fix is the first step to giving disabled veterans full access to the benefit they deserve.

H.R. 1170 – Grant Program for Specially Adapted Housing

This bill directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make grants to encourage the development of new assistive technologies for specially adapted housing for disabled veterans. Grant amounts would be limited to \$200,000 annually per recipient.

H.R. 23 – Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act

This bill establishes the Merchant Mariner Equity Compensation Fund for payments of a monthly benefit of \$1,000 to each individual who, between December 7, 1941, and December 31, 1946, was a documented member of the U.S. Merchant Marine.



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