

# Budget Reform Makes Sense



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from the NATIONAL ADJUTANT

After approving significant funding increases for the Department of Veterans Affairs in each of the past two years, Congress has adopted a 2010 budget plan that would boost veterans health care spending by 11 percent over the 2009 level.

**W**hile great strides have been made to increase VA health care funding over the past several years, timeliness and predictability remain a problem. Although last year's VA appropriations bill was completed on time, funding has been late for 19 of the last 22 years.

The consequences are well documented. Budget delays make it more difficult for VA managers to hire new staff, buy new equipment and make needed repairs and upgrades to medical facilities. Insufficient funding leads to rationed care, long waiting lists and veterans being turned away from VA hospitals and clinics. Worse yet, long-term underfunding and budget delays threaten the quality of care, something the VA has worked hard to achieve and maintain.

This is not a problem of one party or one side of Capitol Hill; it is a systemic problem that cries out for systemic reform. Congress must enact legislation that would provide these resources in a timely and predictable manner.

In February, a bipartisan coalition of Senators and Representatives introduced the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act, common-sense legislation that would authorize advance appropriations for veterans medical care. Congress already provides advance appropriations for a number

of programs, including Head Start, Job Corps and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Fulfilling our nation's promise to provide health care for our veterans should be just as important a priority.

Since the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act's introduction in February, there have been some significant developments that bode well for the legislation's ultimate success. In April, Congress adopted a budget resolution with a provision that clears the way for enacting advance appropriations this budget cycle. And while President Obama also reaffirmed his support for advance appropriations during an April news conference, his formal budget submission was less specific in stating that "The Administration will work with the Congress to develop a specific advance appropriations proposal" for veterans medical care.

Still the measure faces opposition from some in Congress who say it would reduce congressional oversight and weaken the power wielded by appropriators who control the federal purse strings.

But arguments against advance appropriations for veterans health care simply are not supported by the facts. And while, the current version of the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and

*(Continued on page 21)*



### **Appreciative Visitor ...**

Specialist Benjamin Menner (fourth from left) visited DAV National Headquarters recently to thank the Auxiliary for providing health and comfort items to him and his unit overseas. Menner is a member of the U.S. Army 2nd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 172nd Infantry Brigade. He is stationed in the Diala Province of Iraq. His visit included a tour of the Fred R. Bristol Visitor Center with, from left, his grandfather, Don Doppes; mother, Jane Menner; sister, Kelly Menner; Specialist Menner; Auxiliary National Adjutant Judy Hezlep; and grandmother, Joyce Doppes.



### **Running for Old Glory...**

Thousands of veterans and patriotic citizens, including National Commander Raymond Dempsey, left, filled the streets of Cold Spring, Minn., this spring for the "Old Glory Run." The 5 kilometer run/walk/wheel and 1K kids fun run raised funds for DAV.

### **National Adjutant**

*(Continued from page 3)*

Transparency Act can and should be improved, the proposal has been carefully and extensively examined by congressional staff and outside experts.

Here is what they have concluded: an advance appropriation would ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans health care without weakening congressional oversight. Instead of the current system which results in late budgets, Congress would approve funding for veterans' health care services one year in advance of when the money

would actually begin flowing. There would be no disruption of current authorizing and appropriations jurisdiction. Congress absolutely would not lose any of its power to control the budget. The appropriators would continue to exercise their prerogatives under advance appropriations, which unlike entitlement spending does not provide "automatic pilot" funding.

So, members of Congress must not be dissuaded by false arguments from enacting such a common-sense solution that not only solves a decades-old problem but makes government more efficient, transparent and accountable in the process. Congress must pass the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act this year. ☉