

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS



OF THE UNITED STATES

June 23, 2003

The Honorable Lane Evans
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Evans:

On behalf of the 2.6 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Ladies Auxiliary, I am pleased to offer our strong support for H.R. 2318, the *Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act*. This legislation would, for the first time, base the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) funding on the actual demand for services, not Congress's ability to appropriate funding. This legislation also fulfills the intent of VFW Resolution 674, "Mandatory Funding for Veterans' Health Care."

It is clear that VA's current funding structure is failing veterans. The discretionary funding system has consistently fallen short of VFW and Independent Budget recommendations. This has caused VA to ration health care by increasing waiting times, raising co-payment amounts and preventing certain veterans from accessing the system. By VA's own admission, over 200,000 veterans have been waiting six months or longer for their primary health care appointment. This is completely unacceptable.

This important legislation would shift VA funding to a mandatory structure that takes into account the actual demand for services and the increasing costs of providing health care services to veterans. We feel that it would go a long way towards improving the problems that veterans' health care face. It would eliminate the constant year-to-year fight for adequate appropriations that places VA in direct competition with hundreds of other departments and agencies and would ensure that all veterans have timely access to the first-rate health care and services that VA provides.

We thank you for introducing the *Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act*. We look forward to ensuring the success of this important legislation.

Sincerely,


ROBERT E. WALLACE
Executive Director

Enc: RESOLUTION 674
CC: The Honorable Chris Smith

Resolution No. 674

MANDATORY FUNDING FOR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE

WHEREAS, there must be continued and sustained investment by Congress and the Administration in the national resource of the VA health-care system, including improving veterans' access to timely care, protecting and strengthening specialized services, and ensuring that the infrastructure is functional; and

WHEREAS, while the Secretary of Veterans Affairs sets standards for quality, access to health care is often constrained by the level of appropriated funding; and

WHEREAS, the amount of annual funding -- and not the demand for services -- defines overall access to VA health care; and

WHEREAS, without a statutory veterans' entitlement to VA health care, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has no clear obligation to deliver a defined amount of health care nor estimate the physical capacity in response to the demand; and

WHEREAS, the lack of adequate and inconsistent appropriated funding has now resulted in the actual denial of mandated VA health care to veterans, leaving the VA also unable to justify reciprocal capital investments sorely needed to support the efficient access to health care; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is accordingly limited to enhancing quality of health care for some veterans by reducing access for other veterans; and

WHEREAS, as long as the annual appropriation is the statutory determinant of access to quality health care, inconvenience, delay and denial remain the *de facto* cost control mechanisms and restricting any initiative to improve performance; and

WHEREAS, it is now obvious that veterans need a dependable entitlement to high quality health care not only for a basis of proper fiscal and economical planning but also to fulfill the moral mandate to "care for those who have borne the battle"; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to establish a statutory entitlement for veterans' health care as a means to assure veterans receive the care they justly deserve, obviate diminished access as the current primary method of cost control, and provide a basis for justification of those capital investments needed to streamline processes for efficiency improvements.

APPROVED by the 103rd National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, in Nashville, Tennessee, August 24-30, 2002.