

Note from AFA President -- Veterans' Issues

AFA Members, as some of you may know, I have the opportunity to appear quarterly in front of the House leadership to share concerns about the country's support of veterans (and I never miss these sessions). Attending these roundtable meetings are the leaders of all the major committees – the Speaker of the House, Chairmen of Armed Services, Budget, Veterans Affairs, Intelligence, and Milcon/VA Construction Committees – as well as many other Members of the House, myself and other veterans organizations' representatives.

I come prepared to offer remarks on a few issues – and increasingly, AFA's issues have been or are being addressed by the Congress. During the meeting last week, I planned to bring up 5 issues – but did not need to do so because they had been addressed by the Congressional leaders. They were:

- Medicare reimbursements for doctors (and by extension TRICARE). There is a 21% gap, and Congress has routinely solved this year-by-year. Next week the House plans to pass legislation that would provide a permanent "waiver" to the appropriate legislation. The Speaker relayed that the Senate would enact similar legislation for a period of 5 years. It will remain to be seen what compromise will be forged between the two bodies.
- Post 9/11 GI Bill. Presently the bill needs tweaking in a number of areas – address the convoluted tuition and fee system for determining top-dollar funding for each state; providing a housing stipend for distance learners; trade/vocational training that is not covered under the bill; transferability for every eligible military member without the requirement to extend their service to attain the option to transfer their benefit to a spouse or dependent; and extension of eligibility to Guardsmen and Reservists who are serving in an active-duty capacity under Title 32 orders. The House leadership said these fixes were receiving bi-partisan support and they were confident they would be supported in this year's VA bill.
- Concurrent receipt of disability benefits, VA claims backlog, and SBP/DIC offset were all items that were being considered, however, some were more difficult than others to solve. The House leaders stated they will continue to work these ... and they have done so in the past.

I was struck by the number of issues that had been solved in the past three years. The support for our nation's veterans has, in the opinion of the leaders of every veteran's organization, never been higher. As an example VA health care funding had increased by 60% since 2007.

The Speaker passed out a list of "accomplishments" for veterans ... and we have put it on our website. Beware: the document is political in nature ... but recommend you scroll through the piece and review the items. Success in this area has required and did achieve bi-partisan support. We rightfully hold Congress' feet to the fire when we think they need it. We should congratulate them when they stand by our veterans. You can find the piece on our website at: http://www.afa.org/grl/PDFs/Recent_Actions.pdf.

For your consideration.

Mike

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