

VA Funding 2011

\$77.3 billion approved by House committee

The House Appropriations Committee approved \$77.3 billion for FY2011 VA programs as well as \$50.6 billion in advance funding for veterans' medical care for the succeeding fiscal year, 2012. Advance funding is needed to sustain health care activities seamlessly from one fiscal year to the next, because Congress rarely finishes VA appropriations legislation by the first of the fiscal year. The funding measure provides \$48.8 billion for veterans' medical care, an increase of \$3.7 billion above 2010. \$5.2 billion of the total is to be used for mental health services. Other elements of the package provide:

- \$4.2 billion in assistance for homeless veterans
- \$250 million to improve access to care for veterans in rural areas
- \$5.7 billion to maintain and upgrade VA medical facilities
- \$590 million for medical and prosthetic research
- \$2.6 billion to hire and train more than 4000 additional claims processors to reduce the rising claims backlog and process projected new claims
- \$1.5 million for Arlington National Cemetery to hire additional personnel and address deficiencies identified by the Army Inspector General

For the Veterans Affairs Department, the fiscal 2011 Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill (H.R.5822) provides \$56.8 billion in discretionary funding, and \$64 billion for mandatory VA programs. The bill's overall level of discretionary funding is close to the \$77.25 billion the Senate Appropriations Committee approved in its version this month. The Senate bill allocates \$56.99 billion in fiscal 2011 discretionary funding for the VA, and \$50.6 billion in advance appropriations for fiscal 2012. The House voted 411-6 on 28 JUL to approve the bill, the first of the 12 annual spending bills to see floor action this year. H.R. 5822 now moves to the Senate,

CA Outreach, *from page 5*

of Veterans Service Officers, applauded the outreach but said "if we don't get that funding restored, then we're going to be in huge trouble."

Joe Wright, Kings County CVSO and legislative chairman for the state association, said his office workload is so high that appointments already are booked six to seven weeks in advance. "We just can't keep up," Wright said.

Assemblyman Paul Cook, a Yucca Valley Republican who chairs the Assembly's Veterans Affairs Committee, said it would be tragic to shortchange outreach funding but that competition is fierce among state programs for scarce dollars.


"Everybody's got their hand out," he said.

Puntillo said the budget conference committee's proposed \$1.14 million increase would average only about \$20,000 per county, not enough to hire a full-time employee.

"The bottom line is, we need to not do what we did after Vietnam, neglect people who come back from a combat situation," he said.

But Puntillo vowed not to let funding scuttle outreach. "We're going to brave on and get the job done, one way or the other."


which has yet to pass a single appropriations bill this year. Only a week remains before Senators begin their summer recess, so the MilCon/VA bill is unlikely to be addressed in that chamber until lawmakers return in the fall.



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