



Paralyzed Veterans
of America



June 1, 2020

Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Speaker
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Chuck Schumer, Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Kevin McCarthy, Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the millions of veterans, their families and survivors we represent and advocate for, we write to express our concerns that existing Budget Control Act caps on non-defense discretionary spending could lead to insufficient funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for fiscal year (FY) 2021. We call on you to work together and take whatever actions are necessary to fully fund VA programs, services and benefits, including consideration of an emergency spending designation for funding increases resulting from enactment of the VA MISSION Act (P.L. 115-182).

It is our understanding that the overall increase in non-defense discretionary spending allowed under existing budget caps for FY 2021 is only about \$5 billion dollars; however, the enacted FY 2021 advance appropriation increase for VA is already more than \$8 billion, and that's not even enough to cover all of the new requirements created by the VA MISSION Act. This landmark legislation, which was signed into law after the current budget caps were adopted, creates a new VA community care program, expands VA's internal capacity to provide health care, enhances VA's ability to recruit, hire and retain medical personnel; will review, realign and modernize VA's health care infrastructure; and will extend eligibility to VA's comprehensive caregiver assistance program to family caregivers of all severely disabled veterans. While VA has implemented many sections of the law, the true and full cost of all these reforms is just starting to phase in now, with large increases coming in FY 2021.

In addition, there are a number of other critical VA priorities that require significant funding increases for FY 2021 to ensure veterans have timely access to high-quality health care. Congress must continue to support VA's efforts to develop a single electronic health record (EHR) and modernize health data sharing capability to securely exchange records with community health care partners. New investment in VA's research programs are essential for delivering safe and effective health care in the future, a vital role highlighted by the coronavirus pandemic facing veterans and the nation. VA also requires significantly increased appropriations to repair, replace, realign and expand its infrastructure in some areas, which unfortunately has been neglected for years. In fact, VA recently testified it will need at least \$60 billion over the next five years to address its infrastructure backlog and provide space for the tens of thousands of new health care professionals VA requires, including those hired in response to the pandemic.

It has become increasingly clear that VA must continue to be the primary provider of health care for enrolled veterans, particularly during national disasters or health crises, such as the current pandemic. Unfortunately, the existing budget caps for FY 2021 did not contemplate all of the new and increased costs associated with the VA MISSION Act, and we are concerned that unless an agreement is reached to alleviate the budget cap pressure on VA's FY 2021 appropriations, veterans programs and services could be negatively impacted. Congress must take action to ensure VA is fully funded through the appropriations process and not subject to sequestration or other budget enforcement mechanisms.

We recognize and greatly appreciate your continuing efforts to ensure that VA has sufficient resources, particularly the quick action taken to provide VA with nearly \$20 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations for COVID-19 response efforts. We now call on you to take decisive action that will ensure sufficient funding is appropriated to fully and faithfully reform, modernize and sustain the VA health care system for the millions of injured and ill veterans and their family caregivers who rely on it. They are counting on your support.

Respectfully,



Edward R. Reese, Jr.
Executive Director
Washington Headquarters
DAV (Disabled American Veterans)



Carl Blake
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America



Chanin Nuntavong
Executive Director
Government & Veterans Affairs
The American Legion Headquarters, Washington D.C.



Vincent "BJ" Lawrence
Executive Director
Veterans of Foreign Wars

Cc: Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby
Senate Appropriations Ranking Member Patrick Leahy
Senate MilCon-VA Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Boozman
Senate MilCon-VA Appropriations Subcommittee Ranking Member Brian Schatz
House Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Nita Lowey
House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Kay Granger
House MilCon-VA Appropriations Subcommittee Chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz
House MilCon-VA Appropriations Subcommittee Ranking Member John Carter