

STATEMENT OF

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DEPARTMENT OF NORTH DAKOTA

BEFORE THE

SENATE BUDGET COMMITTEE
AMVETS POST 9
BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

BISMARCK, ND
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MR. CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

On behalf of the 2.4 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and our Auxiliaries, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. The VFW works alongside the other members of the Independent Budget, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America to produce a set of policy and budget recommendations that reflect what we believe would meet the needs of America's Veterans.

The President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2009, which begins on October 1, 2008, is a good first step, but it will not meet the needs of this Nation's Veterans. We call on Congress to fully fund VA health care so that all Veterans have timely access to first-rate health care through the VA.

BREAKDOWN:

The President' budget request for all of VA is \$2.9 billion short of what is needed. This includes:

- \$1.6 billion below the \$42.8 billion needed for medical care
- \$113 million below what is needed for medical and prosthetic research
- \$321 million below what is needed for Veterans Benefits Administration and its Disability claims processing programs

- \$1.1 billion short of what is needed for VA's major and minor hospital construction programs

We oppose the President's plan to charge an annual enrollment fee for Category 7 and 8 Veterans, as well as the proposal to raise the prescription drug copayment to \$15.00 from the current \$7.00

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

Full funding would allow VA to provide care to all our older Veterans, but also the hundreds of thousands of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans who have sought care at VA. It would also help reduce the growing 70,000+ Veterans waiting list for VA health care.

Research needs more money so that wounded Veterans can have first-rate prosthetics to help them lead normal lives, and also for the many illnesses, disabilities and conditions not fully understood, such as Traumatic Brain Injury or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This will allow us to provide better treatment for all affected Veterans

VA needs full funding to reduce the tremendous backlog of over 800,000 Veteran's Claims. It would allow VA to hire proper levels of staff and to train its employees to get a better handle on the difficult problem.

VA needs full construction funding to improve access to care for all Veterans, but also to ensure that its aging buildings are properly maintained and safe for all.

This concludes my statement. I wish to personally thank Senator Conrad for the invitation to testify before this Committee.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Dept. of North Dakota