

Sequestration and Continuing Resolutions

VFW's Concerns:

The *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018* provided relief from the impact of sequestration to service members, veterans, and their families. The budget agreement included \$4 billion to address urgent Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) infrastructure needs and increased the non-defense discretionary caps, which enabled VA to start implementing its seamless Department of Defense (DOD) – VA electronic health care record, fund the recent executive order to reduce the rate of suicide among recently discharged veterans, and help it recover from access to care challenges caused by years of underfunding due to outdated spending caps.

However, the bipartisan budget deal simply delays sequestration for two years instead of completely repealing the draconian *Budget Control Act of 2011* sequestration spending caps, which were created in 2011 when the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction failed to agree on \$1.5 trillion in deficit reduction. These spending caps have taken a massive toll on programs critical to the well-being of our nation's service members and veterans. The recent budget deal provides relief, but does not resolve the problem.

The *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018* also established the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform. The committee is required to recommend reforms to the current dysfunctional federal budgeting and appropriations process, which negatively impacts America's heroes.

Compounding the impact of sequestration and the broken federal budget process is the reliance by Congress on continuing resolutions (CR) to fund the federal government. CRs cause instability and uncertainty in the funding process by limiting long-term decision making, preventing new acquisitions, and constraining spending to predetermined category levels. For DOD, this means canceled training, penalties on contracts, delayed maintenance on weapons systems, lack of equipment, cuts to quality of life programs, longer deployments, wear on materials, and an overall decreased readiness status. The lack of a timely, fully funded defense budget hinders DOD's ability to properly plan for our country's defense, defeat our enemies abroad, and execute its most solemn duty — to bring home our missing.

For veterans, a CR means that VA is required to make due with much less than it needs to meet its mission. This means longer wait times for health care appointments and decisions on claims for veterans. Specifically, a CR for VA would significantly hamper its ability to implement recently enacted and VFW-supported landmark veterans legislation, such as the *VA MISSION Act of 2018*, which is intended to expand access to care for veterans, and the *Veteran Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*, to streamline and shorten the time it takes for veterans to appeal decisions on their claims, along with other initiatives such as the implementation of the seamless DOD-VA electronic health care record.

VFW's Solutions:

- The Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Reform must recommend, and Congress must pass, legislation to end sequestration and reform the current broken federal budget process that threatens our national security and limits our ability to provide service members, veterans, and their families the care and benefits they deserve.
- Congress must pass full year appropriations for DOD and VA. Another CR would severely hinder long-term planning and limit the administration's ability to respond to global threats and changes in veterans' programs.