

Resolution No. 601

PROTECTING HEALTH CARE AND BENEFITS

WHEREAS, for more than a century, the Veterans of Foreign Wars has been successful in achieving major legislative and policy changes to secure benefits and services for veterans, survivors, and families; and

WHEREAS, due to the complexities of federal law and regulation, the general public may not be aware of nor fully understand eligibility for veteran disability and medical benefits, in addition to benefits provided to service members, survivors, and families; and

WHEREAS, various news media outlets have published articles suggesting that veterans benefits are too generous; and

WHEREAS, Congressional Budget Office consistently makes unacceptable recommendations like means testing service-connected disability, cutting off temporary disability individual unemployability ratings for elderly veterans, or suspending paid ratings for minor disabilities; and

WHEREAS, the American public asked its all-volunteer force to prosecute two decades of conflict that has subjected Americans to repeated combat deployments and other hazardous conditions; and

WHEREAS, the standard enlistment contract, DD Form 4, commits our nation's leaders to furnishing benefits to those who complete their honorable service; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the President, Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Defense to "Honor the Contract" and protect the current suite of benefits and services for veterans, service members, survivors, and their families.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 602

TOXIC EXPOSURES

WHEREAS, the PACT Act has acknowledged that veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances suffer from an array of conditions and diseases, and should not continue to have to undergo a burdensome claims process; and

WHEREAS, for decades VA was reluctant to establish a clear procedure for establishing additional presumptive conditions related to toxic exposures in service. In compliance with the PACT Act, VA has created a process to research, review, and add presumptive conditions based on association with toxic exposures; and

WHEREAS, veterans of current and past conflicts were exposed to numerous environmental hazards, including open air burn pits, the anti-malaria drug mefloquine, radioactive substances, herbicides and other hazards; and

WHEREAS, the United States military has conducted testing, monitoring, and clean-up operations related to various chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons resulting in exposure both within the borders of the United States and abroad; and

WHEREAS, veterans and family members stationed at Camp Lejeune who consumed contaminated water and now suffer from associated conditions and have recently benefited from the passage of the PACT Act and while VA acknowledged this fact. There are differences in what conditions are compensable and those which only receive reimbursement for medical care. Additionally, the requirement to be stationed on the base for 30 days is arbitrary and ignores thousands who graduated from training in less time; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to invest adequate resources to study, diagnose, and treat conditions and illnesses associated with toxic exposures and provide oversight of VA's presumptive decision process; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs to grant a presumption of service connection for all conditions and illnesses that are deemed by scientific evidence to be at least as likely as not associated with or caused by exposure to a toxic substance or environmental hazard, to be transparent about the presumptive decision process, and to include input from veterans on what exposures and conditions will be reviewed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress and the Department of Defense to reduce or eliminate the use of known toxins on and around military installations and disclose known and potential toxic exposures during all military operations and at facilities within the United States and abroad; and

Resolution No. 602 - continued

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensures that the Department of Defense expedites declassification efforts related to exposure events and that the Department of Veterans Affairs extends presumptive service connection to veterans suffering from conditions or illnesses found to be associated with exposure to toxic substances.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 603

MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has indicated that treating Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and providing Mental Health Care among returning war veterans is one of its highest priorities, and the VA operates a nationwide network of nearly 200 specialized PTSD outpatient treatment programs; and

WHEREAS, the early and accurate screening, diagnosis and treatment for PTSD, depression, substance use, and other mental health disorders, yields optimal patient outcomes, and statistics have shown that these conditions, left untreated or poorly treated, can lead to increases in suicide attempts or death by suicide among a host of other negative consequences; and

WHEREAS, studies conducted by VA show that social determinants of health, like financial stability, access to housing, and pathways to a quality career serve as protective factors against suicide. Each time a veteran uses a VBA economic opportunity program or benefit is an opportunity to provide resources and treatment; and

WHEREAS, the National Center for PTSD found that there are nearly 1.5 million veterans compensated for PTSD since September 2023; and

WHEREAS, available research has not sufficiently evaluated the clinical effectiveness of treatment programs for veterans diagnosed with and/or suffering from the effects of traumatic brain injuries, PTSD, or other mental health conditions, and adequate research into the brain's response to internal and external influences that could result in mental illness has yet to be undertaken; and

WHEREAS, service members and veterans are increasingly prescribed psychiatric medications, but do not need to provide informed consent on the ever-growing side effects such as withdrawal, suicidal ideation, or sexual side effects, and recent research indicates that veterans prescribed such medications may actually be at greater risk of suicide; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we strongly urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to continue to adequately staff VA mental health treatment and research programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to dedicate adequate resources to address the alarming rate at which veterans die by suicide to include moving the Office of Suicide Prevention from Veterans Health Administration to the enterprise level of the Department of Veterans Affairs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to research different treatments or practices that are most effective in helping our veterans cope with their PTSD; and

Resolution No. 603 - continued

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that VA institute strong signatory informed consent protocols on all mental health medications, implement proper and ethical deprescribing guidelines for veterans seeking to stop medication, train prescribers on the emerging reports on psychotropic and psychiatric drugs, and publicize all data to inform the growing concern of overprescription and harm in the veteran community related to psychiatric drugs.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 604

ENSURE VETERAN SUCCESS IN EDUCATION

WHEREAS, our nation has consistently supported the future success of our warfighters through robust veterans' education benefits, historically molding generations of proven leaders; and

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has worked to secure and preserve quality education benefits for all generations of veterans; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs enrolled nearly one million veterans across all G.I. Bill programs in the past academic year; and

WHEREAS, despite an increase in activations domestically for natural disasters, border security, and other missions, and a greater reliance on National Guard and Reserve Component service members, many veterans do not qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit; and

WHEREAS, certain schools and programs seek to circumvent benefit guidelines in order to reap significant financial benefit; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to ensure proper oversight of Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefit programs by developing quality metrics with which to demonstrate student veteran success in higher education, and close financial loopholes through which certain academic programs can exploit GI Bill reimbursement models; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that Congress ensures veterans receive equitable access to benefits like housing payments and quality pre-enrollment educational information to ensure veterans are academically and financially prepared to succeed in higher education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we urge Congress to increase stipends for books, electronic devices such as laptops and tablets, instructional support applications, provide cost of living adjustments, and provide appropriate housing benefits for in-person, online and hybrid programs to give student veterans the proper resources and tools to be successful in their pursuit of higher education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we work to extend earning GI Bill benefits for every day in uniform served, including for those in the Reserve components, and preserve quality GI Bill benefits for veterans of all conflicts to ensure they have access to quality education assistance programs.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 605

VA NURSING HOME ANNUAL INSPECTIONS

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States views it essential to hold the Department of Veterans Affairs accountable to conduct annual inspections, per their regulations, allowing for proper oversight to ensure VA standards of care are being upheld within all VA, state veterans homes, and contracted long-term care facilities; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs oversees all 153 state veterans homes, which provide care to about 14,500 veterans and represents the majority of veterans who receive care in nursing homes; and

WHEREAS, in FY 21, the Department of Veterans Affairs paid nearly \$1.5 billion for the care that was provided to nearly 14,500 veterans in state veterans homes; and

WHEREAS, veterans are increasing in age, as nearly 8 million veterans are over the age of 65, which represents close to half of the veteran population; and

WHEREAS, it is a requirement of the Veterans Health Administration, outlined in VHA Directive 1143.2 to undertake an annual inspection of VA Nursing Homes, and VA contracted nursing homes; and

WHEREAS, Federal law and VA policy prevent VA from making payment to state veterans homes until it determines that they meet applicable quality care and other standards; and

WHEREAS, Officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs report that they rely on the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid inspections to provide feedback on inspections results and any corrective actions needed; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs only has one recourse to enforce standards, which is to withhold per diem payments to the nursing facility, which the VA has never done; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support VA's engagement to increase the quality of care and improve the physical environment provided in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, to include the creation of additional enforcement measures to require compliance with VA care standards when receiving funds for the care of a veteran; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct annual onsite inspections of all VA and contracted long-term care facilities within VA's scope to promote compliance with standards.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 606

DENTAL CARE ELIGIBILITY

WHEREAS, VA eligibility for no-cost dental care is only afforded to veterans who are service-connected with a dental disability or former prisoner of war or rated at 100 percent permanent disabled; and

WHEREAS, veterans enrolled in VA's Homeless Veterans Dental Program or Veteran Readiness and Employment Program may only receive limited VA dental care; and

WHEREAS, out of the 9.2 million veterans enrolled in VA health care, only 15%, or about 1.4 million are eligible for comprehensive dental care; and

WHEREAS, 42% of veterans eligible for VA healthcare report having gum disease, and 60% experience tooth decay; and

WHEREAS, it is reported that veterans pay 65% more in out-of-pocket dental costs, on average, compared to non-veterans; and

WHEREAS, studies have shown that poor oral health has shown to be linked to other general health conditions, and some medical conditions may affect an individual's dental health; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to authorize Department of Veterans Affairs to expand eligibility for dental coverage and care to all service-connected veterans enrolled in VA health care.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No. 607

MEDICARE

WHEREAS, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States views the abolishment of penalties for delayed enrollment to Medicare for veterans as essential to the veteran population; and eliminate penalties, but ultimately to eliminate the mandate for veterans enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs health care to register for Medicare; and

WHEREAS, veterans with limited income or complex health issues may struggle to pay fines associated with delayed Medicare enrollment and these fines accumulated over time making it harder for veterans to access needed care and afford the fines; and

WHEREAS, nearly 8 million veterans are 65 years and older, and eligible for Medicare; and

WHEREAS, there is a confusion around veteran enrollment to Medicare because many veterans utilize the VA Health Care and don't realize the need to enroll in Medicare; and

WHEREAS, these penalties of 10% for each 12-month period you were eligible but did not sign up may discourage veterans from enrolling in Medicare potentially leaving the veteran without necessary health options because these penalties stay with you the remainder of their life; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support the abolishment of penalties for veterans for delayed Medicare enrollment; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge Congress to authorize veterans enrolled in Department of Veterans Affairs health care to be exempt from registering for Medicare if they so choose.

Submitted by Commander-in-Chief
To Committee on VETERANS SERVICE RESOLUTIONS