

Veterans Going to Washington
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On Monday, March 19th, buses of Veterans will be pulling out of Chicago and other cities. On Tuesday, March 20th they will arrive at the Capitol in Washington, DC to let our legislators know exactly how Veterans feel about the cutbacks they face. The Chicago portion of the trip is being organized by the Coalition of Veterans Organizations (CVO). Funding from the trip will come from local Veterans' organizations, from trip participants and supporters.

The focus will be on five main areas. First is to amend or rescind the laws restricting Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans to 2 years of VA healthcare eligibility. Second is to make VA healthcare funding mandatory, rather than optional as it is now. Third is to provide VA benefits to Filipino Veterans from World War II, who have been denied for 60 years. Fourth is to ensure full funding of the Per Diem grants from the VA to states that are used to fund local programs for Homeless Veterans. Fifth is to ensure proper accountability in the use of certain funds for Mental Health care by the VA. Over the past 2 years, the VA has failed to use funds it had in this pressing area.

These are hot issues facing Veterans and Congress. Through lobbying meetings with both Senators Durbin and Obama and Congressional leaders from the Congressional Veterans' Committees, the bus trip to Washington will show that Veterans are directly concerned.

Veterans consider the five issues critical. While Veterans from every other war have had lifetime VA medical care, those from Iraq and Afghanistan have been restricted to 2 years. Studies have shown that many military-related difficulties, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), take ten or twenty years to show up in Veterans. Many Veterans, including CVO, hope to rescind or amend these restrictions.

Currently, VA funding is reconsidered every year, making it an annual hot political issue. Veterans, including CVO and other organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, and the Disabled Veterans of America (DAV), consider it a top priority to get VA healthcare funding made an "entitlement." Entitlements are automatically funded each year. As an entitlement, VA healthcare would be funded according to a formula considering the cost of healthcare and the number of veterans served.

Filipino Veterans, who were inducted into the US Army in World War II and served, among other places, on the terrible Bataan Death March, have been denied VA benefits for 60 years. Also, the VA has failed to properly allocate available funds for Homeless Veterans and for Mental Health care. CVO and other Veterans hope to hold the VA to stricter accountability in these areas.

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