

Protecting VA Budget, DOD Quality of Life Programs Top VFW Legislative Agenda

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WASHINGTON — More than 600 members of the nation's oldest and largest major combat veterans' organization are arriving in Washington this weekend to urge their members of Congress to protect the Department of Veterans Affairs budget from sequestration, as well as Defense Department quality of life programs for the troops and their families.

Armed with the VFW Legislative Priority Goals for 2013, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. will visit every congressional office to present the VFW's legislative position on a variety of veterans' and military issues, ranging from the impact of sequestration on military quality of life programs and future VA budget submissions to VA benefits, healthcare, wounded warriors, women veterans, education, suicides, homelessness, and the need to protect programmed funding increases for the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command.

VFW National Commander John E. Hamilton will present these concerns in testimony before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees on Tuesday morning, followed by the presentation of the 2013 VFW Congressional Award to Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) that afternoon.

As the former chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Senator Murray championed legislation to provide advanced appropriations funding for VA healthcare accounts. She worked tirelessly to advocate on behalf of service members with Post Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injuries, and oversaw improvements in the care and treatment of wounded warriors and women veterans.

"Senator Murray leads from the heart, and we are proud of her leadership, her advocacy, and her staunch support of veterans," said Hamilton, a combat wounded Vietnam Marine Corps rifleman from St. Augustine, Fla. "And even though she stepped down as the VA Committee chair in order to assume the gavel over at the Senate Budget Committee, we know she will remain a powerful voice in Congress for all veterans."

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Other legislative conference events include:

- Hosting a Wounded Warrior Dinner tonight at the National Press Club for about 60 wounded troops and their families from the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at nearby Bethesda, Md.
- Awarding a \$30,000 scholarship Sunday evening at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Va., to the winner of the annual VFW Voice of Democracy program, a patriotic-themed contest that this year judged almost 65,000 high school student entries. The winner will be joined onstage by eight-grader Mariessa McKenna, from Crofton Middle School in Crofton, Md., who beat 110,000 other middle school students to win a \$5,000 scholarship in the VFW's annual Patriot's Pen contest.

The VFW will stream live video of the 2013 Voice of Democracy Parade of Winners beginning at 6 p.m. (EST), Sunday, and post video Tuesday afternoon of the VFW national commander's congressional testimony. View all on the VFW homepage at www.vfw.org.