

# VETERAN NEWS AND NOTES

## America's Veterans And The Price Of Freedom

by Edward S. Banas, Sr.

(NAPSA)—Thousands of American soldiers are, right now, engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq in a fight for freedom and security. A fight for the right of all people—not just Americans—to live in a world free of terror and fear. America's veterans understand that fight. They understand that it takes courage and conviction to never chafe at the burden of their obligations or the agony of their choices—that standing for freedom is a conviction to themselves and their only commitment to mankind.

Now all members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars must be the ones to introduce those who don't understand that price—to the veteran who has lost a limb but not his dignity, or the mother and father that have been told their son or daughter will never be coming home, or the young wife learning her husband will be disabled forever, or the child that has lost a parent so that he or she may grow up in a secure and free country.

It is incumbent upon us, the leaders of this great veterans' service organization, to deliver this message with courage and conviction.

As veterans advocates, we are on the frontlines of improving and protecting the benefits and entitlements of our nation's veterans. We are the veterans' voice on Capitol Hill.

With over 100,000 veterans currently waiting six months or more to see a doctor, it makes me sick to think that convicted criminals get better access to health care than some veterans. All veterans must be entitled to a full



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continuum of health care benefits to include long-term care and a prescription drug benefit that is better than Medicare.

That is why it is critically important for us to remain steadfast in our fight to secure full funding for the VA Health Care system through mandatory funding or some other guaranteed funding mechanism.

It is also important for us to ensure that as VA works to reduce the veterans benefit claims backlog that they do not sacrifice quality for quantity.

Sadly, many of our WWII and Korean veterans are passing away before they ever receive their entitlements.

They did not serve their country for profit. They fought for an ideal—the enduring ideal of freedom that has been the force behind all of America's excursions. Freedom that is the cause for which each and every one of them stood for in harm's way to defend.

Those heroes put their lives between America and war ma-

chines intent on destroying us.

Unfortunately, WWII and Korean veterans are passing away at a rate of 1,800 a day. The National Cemetery system must accommodate these departed heroes in the dignified manner to which they are entitled.

To the members of our Armed Forces I say we love you, we support you, we are proud of you and while you are serving us we are serving you.

We have and always will fight for an improved quality of life for you and your families because we were once in your shoes and we understand the sacrifices you make to serve us. You deserve better pay, housing, healthcare and education for you and your dependents.

When members of America's Armed Forces return home from overseas we want them as members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It is a changing world out there and as the world changes we must be willing to change with it. If we are not to shoulder the burden of leadership in the veterans and military community then who will? The alternatives are neither pleasant nor acceptable.

Great organizations which fail to meet their responsibilities are consigned to the dust bins of history. Only with a new generation of veterans and their infusion of camaraderie and ideas can we hope to provide positive and innovative solutions to our future challenges. The VFW will continue its struggle as long as there is an America.

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