



# America's Defenders

## Caring For Those Who Gave All For Freedom

(NAPSA)—In an era where many issues seem fueled to burn hotter with partisan rancor, it may be refreshing to see how well one group of committees works for a cause of national interest.

The committees on Veterans' Affairs have demonstrated that good politics can make good policy when it comes to the noble cause of taking care of America's veterans. However, many say Congress has not always been able to resist using veterans and veterans' issues as political props, especially when it comes to the annual budget battles.

"We are the men and women who have willingly stood in harm's way so that our nation may remain free," says Edward S. Banas, commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. "When we speak of sacrifice, of courage and of conviction, it is not done lightly. It is for this reason that we are profoundly mindful of our over 100,000 service members in Iraq and the many thousands more currently fighting valiantly in defense of freedom, for all, around the world."

It is on their behalf that the VFW asks Congress to place the highest priority on seeing that the nation's defenders are provided with the most modern equipment, the best training and all the resources needed to afford them every advantage in the war on terrorism. But, the nation's obligation does not end there. The obligation is not fulfilled when their mission is completed or they are discharged from a military medical center. Nor does it end when one of this nation's warriors falls.

"Our nation has a most sacred obligation to its sick and wounded defenders and to their survivors and dependents," said Banas. "This obligation is part of the ongoing



**The nation has an obligation to care for those who willingly stood in harm's way to defend freedom.**

costs of war and the Veterans of Foreign Wars will continue to fight to ensure that these costs are paid."

One of the largest of these costs is health care and because of a lack of adequate funding, the VA has not been able to help the increasing number of veterans who seek quality care.

Since 1996, the number of enrolled veterans has increased nearly 150 percent, while funding has lagged far behind at only a 50 percent increase. The budget currently proposed by the administration is not considered to be adequate to meet the VA's needs. It also calls for an enrollment fee that would limit the ability of many veterans to access the system. The VFW hopes that Congress will act to ensure that all veterans will continue to receive the care they need.

For more information about this issue and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, visit [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org).