

## Veterans' Health Care Budget Greatly Concerns VFW

(NAPSA)—“I am here to make military veterans the number one priority of this nation,” said John Furgess, the commander-in-chief of the 2.4 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars, before a joint hearing of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives’ Committees on Veterans Affairs.

Furgess, of Nashville, leads the nation’s largest organization of combat veterans. He was in Washington recently to respond to the Administration’s fiscal year 2006 budget proposal for veterans’ health care. His message was clear and to the point, calling the budget proposal an “obvious attempt to balance part of the country’s deficit on the backs of a disabled and aging military veteran population.”

In his testimony, Furgess said the Administration’s proposal to increase VA health care funding by an amount that doesn’t cover inflation or uncontrollable expenses sends the wrong message to the 2.2 million Americans currently serving in uniform, and does a disservice to the nation’s 25 million veterans. He also expressed concern about recommendations that would eliminate thousands of VA employees and slash money from programs ranging from long-term care facilities for an aging veteran population to reducing the budget for prosthetic research at a time when better body armor is saving more lives but often at the expense of arms and legs.

“When our nation called, we answered, and in return, the only thing we ever asked for was to be given a square deal afterwards. How are we to take this?” Furgess asked, while making it clear that the budget was an obvious



**CUTS AT A TIME OF WAR—The VFW is greatly concerned that the VA will be unable to provide quality, timely or accessible health care to America’s eligible veterans, according to Commander-in-Chief John Furgess.**

attempt to make the need fit the budget instead of making the budget fit the need.

“We are a nation at war,” he said, “and just as we hold our military personnel accountable to do their duty, so, too, should our nation be held accountable to care for their minds and bodies if they are injured, or care for their families if they die.”

Furgess pledged that the VFW will work side-by-side with Congress to develop a VA health care budget and system that is both affordable and meets the needs of all veterans who want to use the system.

“We can’t make positive changes to the system using a band-aid approach that leaves problems to be addressed by the next Congress or the one after that,” he said. “We must work together if we’re to make a VA that fully fits the need.”