



# Legislative Update: VA, TRICARE, QDR, and RWW

By *CAPT Ike Puzon, USN (Ret)*

*As the President's Budget and the Quadrennial Defense Review were rolled out last week, the issues are mounting ten fold that we all need to consider. If you are at all concerned about the Navy, the Navy's mission and your family, the following are just a few of the topics that impact your benefits, and your Navy.*

## VA 2011 Budget Fast Facts

VA is calling this budget the “transformation” budget. Some of the VA Budget Facts follow.

- \* Provides resources to support the transformation of VA into a 21<sup>st</sup> century organization to ensure Veterans are cared for over a lifetime, from the day the oath is taken to the day they are laid to rest.

### Medical Care

- \* Secures timely, sufficient, and predictable funding for health care through 2012 with advance appropriations.

- \* Continues gradual expansion of health care eligibility, providing access to more than 500,000 previously ineligible veterans by 2013.

- \* \$5.2 billion (up \$410 million) to expand inpatient, residential, and outpatient mental health programs.

- \* \$799 million (up \$265 million) to implement VA's comprehensive plan to reduce homelessness. This includes \$218 million for the Homeless Grants and Per Diem program and liaisons to assist community organizations.

- \* \$250 million to improve access to care in rural and highly rural areas.

- \* \$6.8 billion (up \$859 million) to expand institutional and noninstitutional long-term care services. Of this amount, \$163 million (up \$42 million)

is for home tele-health to improve access to care.

- \* \$218 million (up \$19 million) to meet the needs of female Veterans.

- \* \$2.6 billion (up \$597 million) for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom to meet the needs of over 439,000 veterans.

These are just a few of the facts presented about the VA 2011 Budget. You can view the entire facts at: [http://www4.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/Fy2011\\_Fast\\_Facts\\_VA\\_Budget\\_Highlights.pdf](http://www4.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/Fy2011_Fast_Facts_VA_Budget_Highlights.pdf)

## The Military Health System Blog

<http://www.health.mil/MHSblog/Article.aspx?ID=750>

Do you want to tell TRICARE your issues or do you seek information on your TRICARE benefits?

TRICARE, <http://tricare.mil>, is one of the first health care organizations in the world, military or civilian, to embrace Web 2.0 technology like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Flickr. The results have been staggering as service members, veterans, and their families have been kept up to date more efficiently and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and voice their concerns! This has revolutionized the way TRICARE interacts with its beneficiaries! To capitalize

further on this success, TRICARE will launch a media center Web page during the month of March, which will serve as its central hub for social media activity. This will give users a “one-stop shop” for the latest TRICARE news, beneficiary information, and social media platforms. But before launching the new site, TRICARE is asking you – service members, veterans, and retirees – to give your feedback through Facebook or Twitter. You can sign in during the next few weeks to weigh in on important issues and help TRICARE make their services even better.

## The Quadrennial Defense Review

<http://www.defense.gov/qdr/>

The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is a legislatively-mandated review of Department of Defense strategy and priorities. The QDR will set a long-term course for DoD as it assesses the threats and challenges that our nation faces and rebalances DoD's strategies, capabilities, and forces to address today's conflicts and tomorrow's threats.

This document is very important to the Services and to you. Rarely has the QDR gotten all the issues of concerns correct. Tomorrow's threats are difficult to predict. Because of our free society,



**CAPT Ike Puzon (second from right, front row), AUSN Director of Government Relations, testifying at HVAC.**

values and ideals, we tend to deal with threats based on the past and not the future. I urge you to review this document since it is the second review to be completed during the time of war.

Regarding our abilities to view the future threats, *Investor's Business Dailey* commented: "Last week the Russian air force celebrated the maiden flight of the Sukhoi T-50, Moscow's version of the American F-22 Raptor stealth fighter. We have shut down the F-22 production line, viewing it as an unaffordable and unnecessary extravagance. We mention this in light of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's statement that President Obama's proposed freeze on discretionary domestic programs should also cover defense expenditures. Unfortunately, our enemies aren't freezing their defense budgets. ... Defense is not a discretionary budget item." I agree with this view and hope that you will communicate your opinion to your Congressional delegations that the world is more dangerous than any time in our past. This is not the time to shrink or freeze our defense budget!

## About Returning Warrior Workshops (RWW)

<http://www.ia.navy.mil/rww.htm>

I recently had the opportunity to attend a RWW to observe and understand more fully the issues surrounding

our Navy members and their family members. AUSN has been engaged in congressionally mandating this Yellow Ribbon Program of which the RWW is a part. We urge all those service members to attend a RWW whenever possible. Additionally, this is one of AUSN's legislative goals, and we urge all leaders to support those service members that have deployed recently or in the past to attend a RWW. It is more than worth the efforts for a strong Navy and strong Navy Reserve.

The workshops are for Sailors who have recently returned from a mobilization or deployment as an individual augmentee. They are invited to attend a Returning Warrior Workshop (RWW) with the guest of their choice.

The goal of the workshops is to give service members and loved ones a chance to reconnect. The guest may include a spouse, significant other, or family member. The definition of family member has been expanded to include: girlfriends, boyfriends, parents, brothers or sisters. The events are held at a four-star hotel away from military bases and everyday distractions. Civilian business attire is required. All lodging, meals, conference fees, and miscellaneous expenses are covered at the RWW and include: dinner Friday night, three meals on Saturday, and breakfast and lunch on Sunday. Travel by personal vehicle is encouraged and

mileage will be paid at the current government rate. Ideally, attendees should be within 350 miles of the workshop.

The Returning Warrior Workshop (RWW) is a weekend for the Navy to take care of military personnel who have been deployed in support of combat or combat support operations. Taking care of our people is one of the Chief of Naval Operation's top three priorities. The RWW focuses on three major goals:

1. Honoring the Warrior and the Warrior's guest for their service to our country. Both Active Duty and Reserve members are invited.
2. Providing information about the many resources available for the Active Duty and Reserve family that will assist with reintegration.
3. Raising awareness with the service member and the family about the symptoms associated with combat stress and provide the Active Duty members and Reserve members with resources for assessment and referrals.

**From my perspective,** I cannot say enough great things about the limited exposure that this RWW showed me and my wife as observers. The issues that surround our Navy members about going to war and going ashore are massive. Yet, everyday, we have over 5,000 Reserve members and another 5,000 Active Duty members ashore augmenting the other services in OIF and OEF. The stress of war is real. The issues our Sailors and their families have are not going away. These Returning Warrior Workshops are extraordinary for our Sailors. AUSN will work hard to continue funding them and to ensure the resources are there for the service member's families. More information on RWW is available at <http://www.ia.navy.mil/rww.htm>. AUSN is energized about these workshops and is supporting the efforts. ⤴