

**LEGISLATION INTRODUCED TO SECURE TIMELY FUNDING****FOR VETERANS' HEALTH CARE**

*House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Chairmen joined by bipartisan cosponsors, major veterans' organizations and a former VA official in calling for passage*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-HI), Chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, was joined by a bipartisan group of lawmakers in reintroducing legislation today to secure timely funding for veterans' health care through the advance appropriations process. Chairman Akaka joined House Veterans' Affairs Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA), other members of Congress, leaders from military and veteran organizations, and a former VA executive in calling for prompt consideration of the **Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009**.

Under the bill, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) would be funded one-year ahead of the regular federal funding process. Currently, VHA's budget is subject to delay and uncertainty, hampering budget planning and threatening health care quality for wounded and indigent veterans. The Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act has already received broad support from its Democratic, Republican, and Independent sponsors in Congress.

Senator Akaka said: *"We are a step closer towards securing timely, predictable funding for the nation's largest health care system – the Veterans Health Administration. Our plan would create a transparent process that will help VA use its funding more efficiently and care for veterans more effectively than it has in the past. I am proud to be joined by a bipartisan group of Congressional leaders and major veterans service organizations in calling for an end to VHA's unpredictable funding."*

Congressman Filner said: *"I appreciate the sentiments of Secretary Shinseki to approve and implement future VA budgets on time, but we must also recognize the various obstacles that frequently prevent this from happening. This bill is a way to explore a new manner in which to fund the VA. We need to consider a historic new approach to guarantee that our veterans have access to comprehensive, quality health care that they deserve and have earned. For too many years, VA has had to make do with insufficient budgets resulting in restricted access for many veterans. When funding is short, it is our veterans who pay the price."*

Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) said: *"The breakdown in the process of providing funding for our veterans has a bipartisan history spanning over two decades – under Republican and Democratic control of the White House and Congress. However during this time, health care funding for veterans has only been approved on schedule three times! This is unconscionable. With this bipartisan initiative, we can ensure our veterans and their families truly benefit from the healthcare that these patriots have rightfully earned and deserve."*

Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) said: *"It's about time we take the uncertainty out of the annual funding for VA health care. Making sure all veterans have access to quality, affordable health care—so they don't have to come to Congress every year with hat-in-hand—is a promise we owe all men and women who served in uniform."*

Congressman Phil Hare (D-IL) said: *"Like the mandatory funding legislation I introduced in the last Congress, advanced appropriations is the means to an end. That end is ensuring veterans receive the best care possible from a VA that has access to timely, sufficient, and predictable resources. I enthusiastically support this bill and commend Chairmen Akaka and Filner for introducing it."*

Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA) said: *“One of the best ways we can honor the service of our brave veterans is by providing them with the high-quality health care and services they need. Advance funding for veterans health care will allow the VA to make strategic budgetary decisions that will improve the care provided to our veterans.”*

Senator Bernard Sanders (I-VT) said: *“The VA needs to receive its budget in advance so it can hire the right number of staff to take care of our veterans without waiting for Congress to pass their spending bill. How can we expect the second largest agency in the federal government, which provides health care to over 5.5 million people, to function when they don’t know when they will get their budget? That is why the time for advanced funding for the VA has come. I look forward to working with the president, Secretary Shinseki, Chairman Akaka and our nation’s veterans’ service organizations to make sure this bill is signed into law this Congress.”*

Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) said: *“Our veterans deserve to know that they will receive the health care they need in a timely and predictable fashion. This is just one small way we can thank them for their service to our country. By authorizing two-year budget authority for the VA, the nation’s largest health care provider will have the funding and stability to adequately plan and prepare to deliver a level of service and care that our nation’s veterans so richly deserve and have so honorably earned.”*

Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) said: *“We owe our veterans and their families the best quality care we can provide. Our soldiers and sailors do their duty to protect America, so it’s our duty to provide for them when they return home.”*

Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) said: *“Setting funding two years in advance will help ensure that no veteran is ever turned away, and I am pleased to support this important legislation introduced by Senator Akaka.”*

Congressman Mike Michaud (D-ME), Chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Health, said: *“Too often in recent years, VA has been funded after the beginning of the fiscal year and in one case, so underfunded that they required a supplemental appropriation. This cannot be allowed to occur when we are dealing with the health care of our veterans. There must be a timely, sufficient, and predictable funding stream for VA health care. That is what this legislation will achieve.”*

Senator David Vitter (R-LA) said: *“Veterans’ health care is a particularly important issue, and as our servicemembers return from combat theatres in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Veterans’ Administration has seen a significant growth in demand for health services. Historically, the VA’s health care budget has been delivered late, and appropriations levels have been often too low. This bill would allow the VA to plan better by allowing appropriations to be made for the upcoming and following fiscal years.”*

The Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act is supported by the [Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform](#), a coalition of major veterans service organizations including The American Legion, AMVETS, Blinded Veterans of America, Disabled Veterans of America, Jewish War Veterans, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America. The bill received [unanimous support](#) from a panel of six veterans organizations at a recent Senate hearing.

For Chairman Akaka’s prepared remarks on the bill, click [here](#).