

Commander applauds Senate leadership for sending VA budget-reform bill to the floor

American Legion National Commander David K. Rehbein expressed support and urged swift action on S. 423, the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009, which has been sent to the Senate floor for passage. The measure would require timely budgets for VA health-care facilities throughout the country.

““The entire veterans’ community is unified in its efforts to reform the VA medical care budget process,” Rehbein said. “Traditionally, VA health-care administrators have no idea how much money they will have to run the nation’s best health-care delivery system or when the money will be available. These unknowns pose major challenges in making effective and efficient long- and short-range management decisions.”

Rehbein said he applauds the leadership of Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Daniel Akaka, D-Hawaii, and his colleagues for sending the legislation to the floor for a vote. The committee adopted the bill unanimously in a Thursday hearing.

Until recent years, the VA medical care budget has faced delays that often have run well into the second quarter of the new fiscal year. “Although Congress has done a much better job in recent years, the potential for the VA medical care budget falling back into the untimely, unpredictable and insufficient cycle is still very, very real,” Rehbein said. “Advance appropriations does not cost anything, but simply identifies one year in advance how much money will be available for VA medical care. That funding level can be adjusted if necessary, but the VA secretary will know on Oct. 1 of each year the amount that will be available to meet the needs of veterans enrolled in the system.”

Rehbein said The American Legion appreciates the support of President Obama, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, and a growing list of lawmakers who favor the act. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner, D-Calif., has introduced similar legislation in the House of Representatives. “The American Legion will work with both leaders in moving this legislation from their respective committees to the president’s desk,” Rehbein said. “This legislation has the support of all major veterans’ service organizations, many former VA health care leaders, and millions of veterans who use the VA health care delivery system as their primary health care provider.”