



The ALLIANCE



Volume 13 • Number 1

Winter - 2017

Trump Takes Over as Commander In Chief, Promising to Restore Military Strength



President Donald Trump

By Leo Shane III, *Military Times*

Business mogul Donald Trump was sworn as the nation's 45th commander in chief on Jan. 20th, promising to return government to the people and return American might to the international stage.

"This American carnage stops right here and stops right now," he told a crowd of Washington, D.C.

dignitaries and tens of thousands of supporters under dreary skies on the steps of the Capitol. "We are one nation and our fellow Americans' pain is our pain. Their dreams are our dreams and their success will be our success. We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny."

Trump's speech echoed the populist themes of his unconventional presidential campaign, one that saw him rise from reality television star to Republican presidential nominee to the Oval Office.

His inauguration speech also repeated one of his most

frequent national security promises of the campaign trail: a full re-evaluation of American foreign military aid. "For many decades, we've enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry, subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military," he said. "We've defended other nation's borders while refusing to defend our own, and spent trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay. We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon. But that is the past. And now we are looking only to the future."

He did not reference NATO by name, but has repeatedly questioned whether America should continue its leadership and stewardship role in the military alliance. The new president has frequently promised to boost defense spending and increase American military might, adding thousands more troops, ships and aircraft to the Pentagon's arsenal. And he has promised a full rethinking of the country's national security priorities.

(cont'd on page 4)



REPORT from the HILL

It took them until mid-December last year, but Congress finally managed to pass both the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2017, and also a veterans' bill. Because this is our first issue of the *Alliance* since the end of the year, I want to review the highlights of what they passed.

By way of explanation, each

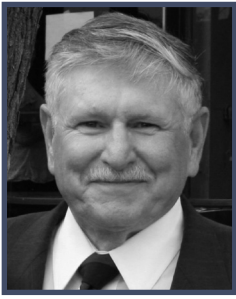
session of Congress lasts for two years and those sessions coincide with each Congressional election. Bills that were introduced in 2015 or 2016 but didn't pass are dead. Bills that are introduced this year but are not passed can carry over into next year, but if they don't pass then, they are dead and must be reintroduced in the next Congress. Following are key elements of the NDAA for FY2017:

TRICARE Benefits and Fees

- There will be no changes to TRICARE For Life in 2017.

- Imposes significantly increased fees and copays only for those who will enter service on or after January 1, 2018.
- Grandfathers currently serving and currently retired members and families against most increases, except current retirees and family members enrolled in TRICARE Standard (which will be renamed TRICARE Select). They will pay a new enrollment fee of \$150/\$300 (single/family) per year, starting in 2020. Chapter 61 (medical) retir-

(cont'd on page 3)



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Bernd Dela Cruz

According to Fox Business News, a loaf of bread in 2000 was \$1.00. Now you pay at least twice that much. Ground beef was \$1.90 in 2000 and while you can find it for \$1.99 on sale some places, over ¼ of the pound is fat. In fact, food manufacturers have turned to cheaper substitutes or have reduced the size of the packages they sell so prices will remain low and are not passed onto consumers.

In addition, a postage stamp was 33 cents in 2000 compared to 49 cents today. That's a 50 percent increase in cost.

Why am I telling you this? Because I want to demonstrate that the costs for some things keep going up and can force us to make hard decisions.

For AFTEA, those postage increases are very hard to deal with in relation to publishing and sending you *The Alliance*. Printing and paper costs have also increased and are other key factors in our publishing costs.

We, of course, are a non-profit association. That means we rely on the dues you pay and the donations that are sent to help us in our work to fight for you. And while we do have a small amount of advertising in *The Alliance*, it's not nearly enough to pay for the ever-increasing costs we have.

The last thing we want to do is raise our annual dues

rate to help us meet our expenses. So, we have had to make a hard decision. Starting with this issue, we will be publishing four times per year instead of six.

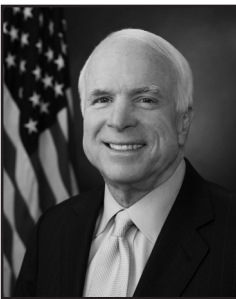
As I said, it's not what we wanted to do but we must do it in order to be responsible stewards of AFTEA and make sure we can sustain our efforts going forward.

We will strive to continue to give you the best information about what is going on in Washington D.C. with regard to your promised and earned military benefits and I want to thank you for your support of AFTEA and for your understanding of this difficult but necessary decision.

The good news is thousands of members and the military community are receiving our newest publication – the *Alliance Weekly* – emailed directly to their inbox every week!

Stay informed and connected – the *Alliance Weekly* is where you'll read about what's going on in the military and veteran community, and learn how it will affect you and your family. Plus, get the inside information on veteran's issues and benefits. To begin your free subscription, email AllianceWeekly@aol.com, or call (800) 808-4517.

McCain Fires Opening Shot in Pentagon Budget Wars with Buildup Plan



Sen. John McCain

His proposal warns that failing to act "will irreparably damage our military's ability to deter aggression and conflict."

Sen. John McCain is set to propose a military buildup that would add nearly half a trillion dollars to the defense budget over the next five years and blow past current limits on Pentagon spending, according to a copy of the blueprint drafted by the chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

The proposal is the opening salvo of Republican hawks as they seek to leverage GOP majorities in the House and Senate and seize upon the surprise

victory of President Donald Trump, who campaigned on a pledge to rebuild the armed forces.

The 21-page plan advocates boosting the Pentagon budget as well as nuclear weapons spending in the Department of Energy by approximately \$430 billion over budget projections between fiscal 2018 and 2022, including to finance a bigger Army and significantly more new warships and fighter jets.

It would also bust through the spending caps now mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act, which are not set to expire until after 2021 and would have to be overturned.

Both McCain and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), who has also called for more defense spending, have long contended that President

Barack Obama has not proposed defense budgets sufficient to meet global threats.

"For too long, we have allowed budget constraints to drive strategy," the Arizona Republican's proposal argues. "It is time to turn this around and return to the first order question: What do we need our military to do for the nation?"

"It is not cheap," the paper concedes of the price tag, but adds: "The cost of further inaction, however, is worse: We will irreparably damage our military's ability to deter aggression and conflict."

The plan calls for \$640 billion in defense spending for fiscal year 2018, \$54 billion above current projections. Combined with \$60 billion in projected spending for overseas operations in

(cont'd on page 6)

Report from the Hill

(cont'd from page 1)

ees and survivors of members who died on active duty will be exempt from this enrollment fee.

- Establishes a new requirement for retired members and families (except TRICARE For Life) to enroll annually in either TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select, starting this year. **This means they will have to physically sign a piece of paper to enroll; enrollment will be required for TRICARE coverage.**
- Eliminates a requirement to get pre-authorization for urgent care, and requires all military medical facilities to maintain urgent care hours until 11 p.m.
- Authorizes DoD to provide hearing aids to family members of retirees at DoD cost.
- Authorizes a pilot program of offering commercial insurance coverage to Reserve component members and families on the same basis as federal civilians.
- Requires implementation of standard appointment system at all military facilities no later than Jan. 1, 2018, including issuance of appointment on first call and 24/7 online service availability.
- Authorizes retired members and families to participate in federal civilian dental and vision plan (the current retiree dental program will go away).

Currently Serving Issues

- Approves a 2.1 percent 2017 military pay raise.
- Increases force levels for all services significantly above the Pentagon proposals.
- Eliminates 2-year eligibility limitation (after PCS) for noncompetitive appointment of military spouses to federal civilian positions.
- Authorizes up to 12 weeks of paid leave (including 6 weeks medical recuperation leave) for primary

caregiver after childbirth; 21 days authorized for servicemember who is the secondary caregiver.

Following are key elements of the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016:

- **Survivor Benefits.** Streamlines the delivery of survivor benefits from the VA, making it unnecessary for a survivor to apply separately to DoD and the VA.
- **Veterans Court Judges.** Extends the temporary increase in the number of judges on the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. The extension adds two more judges for another four years to handle the appeal workload, which already has an extreme backlog.
- **GySgt Fry Scholarship.** Expands the eligibility for Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarships to include members of the military who died beginning on Sept. 11, 2001.
- **Immunizations.** Aligns the VA's definition of preventive health services with the current adult immunization schedule used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The VA is now required to establish quality measures and metrics to ensure veterans receiving medical care in the VA are notified on a regular schedule for immunizations should they choose to use the preventive service.
- **Mental Health Counselors.** Expands the qualification requirements for individuals the VA hires as licensed professional mental health counselors to include providers with doctoral degrees in mental health counseling.
- **Physician Work Hours.** Allows greater work hour flexibility by allowing physicians to work more or less than 80 hours in a biweekly period as is currently done in the

private sector. VA leaders say this is essential to attract new hires.

- **Graduate Medical Education.** Increases the number of graduate medical education residency positions at VA medical facilities to 1,500 over the next 10 years.
- **Toxic Exposure Research.** Requires the VA to conduct an assessment on scientific research related to descendants of veterans with toxic exposure and recommend to Congress the feasibility of conducting further research regarding health conditions of descendants of exposed veterans. If further research is deemed feasible, the VA would establish an advisory board to help the Secretary of VA in carrying out further research going forward.

We have concerns about both the new military health care system and the retirement system. Under age 65 retirees will have to pay more for their health care and active duty personnel will have to pay more for their retirement benefit and their health care starting next year. We will watch to see if recruitment into the all-volunteer force will be hurt and we will remain vigilant to make sure they don't come back and try to make current retirees pay more.

Much also remains to be done at the VA to provide better access to care and reduce the backlog of claims.

Given the highly partisan atmosphere in Washington D.C. it's amazing they accomplished as much as they did. Now that one party controls both the Congress and the Presidency it will be interesting to see what they are able to accomplish this year.

Several bills of interest to military retirees, veterans, and survivors, as well as Active Duty and Guard and Reserve personnel, have been introduced so far this year. By the time you read this several more will have been introduced.

(cont'd on page 5)

Trump Takes Over as Commander In Chief, Promising to Restore Military Strength

(cont'd from page 1)

“We assembled here today are issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital, and in every hall of power,” he said. “From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it’s going to be America first. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families.” He promised to reinforce alliances with friendly nations but also to “unite the civilized world against radical Islamic

terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth.” Much of the speech painted a pessimistic view of America under President Barack Obama’s leadership, lamenting problems of crime and unemployment and tying them a decline in the national prestige.

But he also pledged to work to unite the country after a vicious year-long campaign, and told the country that “there should be no fear” in looking to the future. “We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement and, most importantly, we are protected by God,”

he said. “We must think big and dream even bigger.”

More than 13,000 military personnel took part in the inauguration, providing security and ceremonial service for several days of events. Trump praised them in his speech as an example for the rest of the country.

“It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American flag,” he said.

Former Army Doctor Plans a Health Care Focus for House Veterans’ Affairs Committee

Rep. Phil Roe has been a licensed physician for the last 46 years, so it comes as little surprise that health care issues will be among his top priorities when he takes over the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee next year.

“You have got to put patients and doctors, veterans and doctors back in charge of the department’s health care system,” the 71-year-old Tennessee Republican said. “Not bureaucrats deciding everywhere you go and everything you do. You’ve got to let patients decide what is best for them. That may be staying inside the VA system. Or it may be having your private doctor outside the system. But the veteran can decide that.”

Roe, an Army medical corps veteran entering his fifth term in Congress, became House Republicans’ top voice on VA reform efforts, replacing retiring committee chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla.

In that role, he’ll be at the forefront of efforts to expand veterans’ medical choices in the wake of VA’s 2014 medical wait times scandal, a problem that administrators and lawmakers have fought over for the last two years.

The debate has invoked criticism that conservatives are looking to tear apart the existing veterans’ health care system and slowly hand over those responsibilities (and funding) to private sector practices. But Roe insists his goal is finding the proper balance between choice for patients and a robust medical safety net for veterans.

He trained at VA facilities early in his career, and said he sees partnerships with outside medical centers as a logical step in providing more care to veterans without dismantling VA infrastructure.

“If you read through the Commission on Care report, one of their primary recommendations was setting up a primary

care network for veterans,” he said, referring to a congressional advisory board’s recent findings. “So, if that veteran lives 10 miles or 50 miles or 100 miles from a VA hospital, you could see a certified primary care doctor instead.”

Like other Republicans in the House, he’s leery of major new VA builds after multiple construction projects have come in over budget and behind schedule. He has been pleased with smaller VA clinic builds and leases in underserved areas.

Almost immediately, he’ll be charged with evaluating the future of the contentious VA Choice Card program, which allows some veterans to seek outside care at the department’s expense. It’s scheduled to run out of funding in 2017.

Senators, including John McCain, R-Ariz., have pushed to refund the program and make it permanent, even as they complain that VA leaders have stalled and mismanaged the program.

Roe said he supports the Choice initiative but wants his first steps as chairman to compile a plan for the future of VA, drawing input from fellow lawmakers and outside groups. He expects to conduct that work in the first three months of the new Congress, and use the findings as a framework for appropriate legislation.

He’s also recruiting newly elected veterans and physicians to join the committee, hoping they can bring additional perspective to the work.

“We need to be looking at what health care is going to be looking at in 5, 10, 15 years,” he said. “We’ve been where we’ve been, and we can’t keep doing things the same. There’s not a bottomless pit of money. We have to spend resources more wisely.” ❄️

Report from the Hill

(cont'd from page 3)

These bills are all initiatives of individual Senators and Representatives.

However, what Congressional leaders wait for each year is the President's budget. That is especially important this year because we have a new President who has indicated he wants to do things differently. Once the President sends his budget requests, Congress then holds hearings and reacts to what the President has requested. No President gets all that he asks for, and the things he does get usually depends on whether his party is in control of Congress.

The usual time frame for the President's budget to be delivered to Congress is February or March. However, it is possible that will be pushed back into April this year because so many of the senior positions in the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs have yet to be filled. Following are some of the bills of interest to the military community that have been introduced so far.

H.R. 578 (Military Residency Choice Act). Congressmen Rob Wittman (VA-01) and Darrell Issa (CA-49) introduced this legislation aimed at easing the tax burden on military families by allowing them to establish one consistent state of residency.

Under current law, active duty service members are able to maintain one state of legal residency for tax purposes even when they move on military orders. Spouses may be granted the same benefit, but only if both service member and spouse have the same tax residence at the time of their marriage. This causes complications when service members move, sometimes multiple times a year, because spouses are forced to establish residency in each new location. The Military Residency Choice Act will allow military spouses, if they so choose, to establish the same state of residency as the service member, so that for any future moves, they will retain the same state for tax and voting purposes.

H.R. 333 and H.R. 303. As the new Congress has been sworn in on Capitol Hill, companion concurrent receipt bills have been introduced in both houses of Congress.

In the House, Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-Ga.) reintroduced H.R. 333, the Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act, and Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) reintroduced H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act. Both bills essentially seek to change the law and permit eligible retirees with disability ratings less than 50 percent to receive full concurrent receipt. H.R. 333 also targets support for Chapter 61 retirees with less than 20 years of service.

With the retirement of former Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, two new members of the Senate have stepped up to introduce legislation. Sens. Dean Heller (R-Nev.) and Jon Tester (D-Mont.) introduced **S. 66**, The Retired Pay Restoration Act.

H.R. 369. This legislation would eliminate the sunset of the Veterans Choice Program by Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn). In 2014, it was discovered that many veterans who were eligible for VA health care were being put on secret waiting lists, resulting in long, unreported wait times. As a result Congress passed the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act.

The law gives veterans who have waited more than 30 days for an appointment, or who live more than 40 miles from a VA medical facility, the choice to seek VA-funded care outside of the VA system. However, without this new legislation the funding for the Choice Act will expire on Sept. 30th of this year.

H.R. 412 (Enlisted Legal Assistance Act) by Rep. Brenda Lawrence (D-Mich.). This legislation would amend title 10, United States Code, to require the provision of legal assistance to junior enlisted personnel of the Armed Forces and their dependents in connection with their personal civil legal affairs.

H.R. 299, is a bill to restore the presumption of Agent Orange exposure to those veterans who served in the bays, harbors, and territorial seas of Vietnam. It would correct the VA's policy decision implemented in 2002 that unilaterally striped these veterans of the presumption of exposure granted by the Agent Orange Act of 1991.

Three other issues that we are watching closely are the changes being implemented in commissaries, the military services not providing proper funding for the MWR programs, and new proposals for another round of base closures.

The commissaries will be implementing new programs this year that the Defense Commissary Agency leaders hope will enable them to reduce the amount of taxpayer funding that is needed each year. At AFTEA we are concerned the value of the benefit to military shoppers may be reduced.

With regard to the MWR programs, the military services have not provided proper funding for these programs. So far it is not clear why this has been happening. We will keep an eye on this problem and if need be seek a legislative remedy from Congress.

Finally, Sen. John McCain (R- Ariz.) who is Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has said he is seriously considering legislation to begin a new round of base closures. This comes at a time when DoD is trying to push military retirees back into military health care treatment facilities. New base closures would have the real potential of reducing the health care options for some retirees. This is another issue we will be watching closely. ❄️

McCain Fires Opening Shot in Pentagon Budget Wars with Buildup Plan

(cont'd from page 2)

Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, that would bring total defense spending next year to just over \$700 billion.

That compares with \$611 billion authorized for this year, including for the Pentagon, Department of Energy, and separate war funds.

Including war funding, defense spending would top out at just over \$800 billion in fiscal 2022, according to the McCain plan.

The blueprint advocates increasing the size of the Army to over 500,000 active-duty soldiers. While it calls for the Army to study its optimal size and shape, it says a “realistic objective” would be to add 8,000 troops per year through 2022.

The plan also calls for the Marine Corps to grow to 200,000 by fiscal 2022, or at about 3,000 additional Marines per year. The Navy, meanwhile, should “ramp up shipbuilding as much and as quickly as possible.”

But it acknowledges that the Navy can't reach its goal of 355 ships, 81 over the current size, in just five years. Instead, the plan calls for buying 59 ships in five years. That is 18 more than the current plan, including five more attack submarines, three destroyers, two amphibious ships and five fleet oilers.

The plan for the Navy also recommends a “high/low mix” in Navy aircraft carriers, relying on smaller, conventionally powered carriers, not simply nuclear-powered ones now in the fleet to take on “day-to-day missions.”

The Air Force may require upwards of 60 combat squadrons of about 1,500 combat aircraft, according to the blueprint. It proposes purchasing 73 additional F-35 Joint Strike Fighters for the Air Force and 20 extra F-35s for the Marine Corps through 2022.

But McCain's plan also casts doubt on the goal of purchasing a total of 1,763 F-35s for the Air Force as is now planned. “This goal is unrealistic and requires reevaluation,

and likely a reduction, of the ultimate size of the F-35 buy,” the paper states.

To further beef up the fighter force, it calls for the Navy to purchase an extra 58 F/A-18 Super Hornets and 16 EA-18G Growlers over the next five years.

Other notable items from McCain's proposal:

— Truncating purchases of the embattled Littoral Combat Ship at 28 total ships and speeding up procurement of the Navy's next small surface combatant. “We must get beyond it as soon as possible,” the paper argues.

— Increasing research and development funding to field new capabilities. “Priority areas,” according to the paper, include cyber and space capabilities, unmanned systems, directed energy, electronic warfare and nanotechnology.

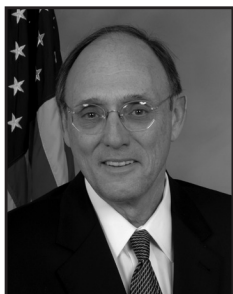
— Maintaining and modernizing each leg of the nuclear triad -- missiles, bombers, and submarines -- and overhauling the Energy Department's nuclear weapons facilities. “The costs, while significant, are manageable,” the proposal argues of nuclear forces.

— Accelerating development of new missile defense systems. The plan calls for investing in “the next generation” of missile defense capabilities. “Important development areas should include boost phase defense programs, directed energy, hypervelocity projectiles, high-power microwaves, battle management using learning machines, and space-based capabilities,” it says.

The plan also assumes \$60 billion will be needed each year over the next five years to pay for military operations in the Middle East and elsewhere, costs that are covered by the so-called Overseas Contingency Operations budget, which is not counted against the spending caps.

But the paper says that “the moment the Budget Control Act is finally repealed,” those war costs should be shifted into the Pentagon's regular budget for good. ❄️

Key Republican Suggests VA Budget May Be Big Enough Already



Rep. Phil Roe

of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The days of ever-increasing budgets for the Department of Veterans Affairs may be over, according to comments from the new chairman

Veterans' Affairs

Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., said after the committee's first meeting of the new congressional session that he doesn't think the problems facing the massive veterans' bureaucracy stem from a lack of funding. “I think we have enough money in the VA system to do our mission,” he said. “I think we're just not spending it wisely.”

“I think we have the resources there, we just have to spend the money smarter. I think we can work with the

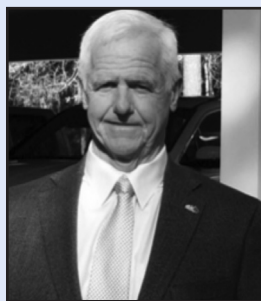
budget we have.”

The department's budget for fiscal 2017 totals \$176.9 billion, including mandatory benefits spending and \$74.4 billion in discretionary funds. In fiscal 2001, the VA budget was \$45 billion for discretionary and mandatory funds.

Much of that increase came during the tenure of President Barack Obama, where yearly budget increases of at least 4 percent were the norm. VA officials

(cont'd on page 7)

Two Pine Belt Members Honored Consecutively as Veteran of the Year



George Herrington



Marion Walley

Two members of the Pine Belt Chapter in Hattiesburg, Mississippi have been selected Veteran of the Year for the local area. George Herrington, retired Air Force CMSgt (left), was chosen for 2016; Marion Walley, chapter president and founder, won the

honor in 2015. He is a retired Army CSM. Both men have been active in the organization since its founding and have been responsible for an annual Veterans Day Parade that's the largest in the state. ❄️

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The AFTEA Alliance

is published bi-monthly by the
Armed Forces Top Enlisted
Association
1 (800) 808-4517

Publisher
Bernd Dela Cruz
CSM USA (Ret)

Executive Editor
Catherine Tavarozzo

Managing Editor/Designer
Sue Boyles

Key Republican Suggests VA Budget May Be Big Enough Already

(cont'd from page 6)

in the last administration said the increase in veterans' use rates for programs and new mandates from lawmakers necessitated large jumps in funding.

But Republicans on Capitol Hill over the last year have begun questioning whether annual spending increases for the department are producing worthwhile returns, and hinting at more fiscal belt-tightening for VA programs. Billions of dollars allocated for personnel plus ups at understaffed medical centers did not necessarily result in more medical workers or better service for veterans.

Roe's predecessor, former Florida congressman Jeff Miller, and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee chairman Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., made similar comments at the start of 2016, but lawmakers still approved a 4 percent increase in VA spending later in the year.

Roe's comments come as President Trump looks to overhaul parts of VA, following his campaign promises to improve services and access to all veterans. Trump has hinted that could include expanding more private care options for some patients, a plan that outside analysts

have said could add billions of dollars more to the VA budget.

The committee chairman said reconciling those issues is "a huge challenge ahead" but said that congressional oversight and scrutiny of money being spent will be key in the months to come.

"I don't believe we are getting our money's worth right now," he said of the VA budget. "I believe we can do better." ❄️

NOTICE OF ELECTION RESULTS

This is to report that all current Officers and Directors were re-elected, and resumed office on January 1, 2017.

"Thank You" to the membership for participating in the election.

George W. Miles
Chairman, Nominating & Elections



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In This Issue

Trump Takes Over as Commander In Chief, Promising to Restore Military Strength page 1

Report from the Hill..... page 1

President's Column..... page 2

McCain Fires Opening Shot in Pentagon Budget Wars with Buildup Plan page 2

Former Army Doctor Plans a Health Care Focus for House Veterans' Affairs Committee page 4

Key Republican Suggests VA Budget May Be Big Enough Already..... page 6

Notice Of Election Results page 7

Two Pine Belt Members Honored Consecutively as Veteran of the Year..... page 7



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