

NewsBytes April 5, 2019

In this issue:

Budget Moves Forward

Will the VA's IT Disrupt Healthcare

Empowering Employers to Hire Reserve Members

Budget Process Moves Forward by Raising Spending Caps

As reported in the March 15, 2019 *NewsBytes*, the Trump Administration has delivered its proposed FY2020 budget to Congress. In response, the House Budget Committee has voted to raise Sequestration budget caps that were mandated by the Budget Control Act (Public Law 112-25), which provides more Defense funding and results in a 2.6 percent increase in defense spending. The Trump administration's budget calls for a 4.9 percent increase in Defense spending for FY2020. The FRA supports eliminating or raising spending caps on Defense to provide adequate funding for both personnel and weapons programs (bullets and benefits).

HVAC Chair Concerned VA's IT Could Disrupt Healthcare for Veterans

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mark Takano (Calif.) issued the following statement regarding the serious concerns raised about the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Information Technology (IT) solutions:

"The recent U.S. Digital Service (USDS) report on implementation of technology systems to support the Community Care components of the MISSION Act is incredibly alarming. By suggesting that VA's planned IT solutions are inadequate, and that VA has not given itself enough time to develop a workable system, this report raises real concerns that implementation may be delayed and could even disrupt healthcare for 75,000 veterans every day.

"USDS raises credible concerns that Community Care should have a veteran-centric approach, but despite these critiques, VA appears to be ignoring the problem or at least is unwilling to revisit its approach. Nowhere is this clearer than VA's intention to formally request a funding transfer to implement the very IT solutions USDS raises concerns about.

"VA's history of failed IT systems shows that it cannot move forward with this IT implementation without addressing these root problems. The Committee will hold a hearing to demand answers from VA about the status of system development and will scrutinize the funding transfer request in light of these troubling findings."

The FRA believes congressional oversight of ongoing implementation of the VA technology upgrades is vital to ensuring improvements to the system. The FRA wants to ensure adequate funding for Department of Defense and VA health care resource sharing in delivering seamless, cost effective, quality services to personnel wounded in combat and other veterans and their families.

Bill Empowers Employers to Hire Reserve Component Members

Congressman Tim Ryan (Ohio) and Congressman Steven Palazzo (Miss.) have introduced the Reserve Component Employer Incentive, Compensation, and Relief Act (H. R.801). The bill provides employers with a tax credit aimed to offset costs accrued and hardships undertaken when employees that are members of the Reserve Component (National Guard and Reserves) are activated for military duty. This legislation will incentivize employers to hire and retain these service members.

This bill recognizes that the Reserve Component has transitioned from a Strategic Reserve to an Operational Reserve, the National Guard and Reserves are fully integrated in ongoing national security missions around the globe. This transition has led to increased training requirements which go beyond the statutorily required 39 days of annual training to requirements, totaling 80 or more days per year.

The FRA wants to ensure Congress adequately funds and supports Reserve Component requirements for an operational reserve. Members can weigh in on this legislation by going to the [Action Center](#) online and scroll down to the appropriate bill.