

Obama Wants Two-Year Budgets for VA

By: Elizabeth Kenigsberg (Thursday, Apr 09, 2009)

Lawmakers are set to consider a request from the Obama administration to begin advance funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, along with other proposals for modernizing veterans' health care.

President Barack Obama today outlined his upcoming plans for the VA that would seek to establish an electronic health care record for members of the armed services that would be overseen by the Defense Department and the VA.

"This would represent a huge step towards modernizing the way health care is delivered and benefits are administered for our nation's veterans" Obama said. "It would cut through red tape and reduce the number of administrative mistakes," he added, pointing to instances of lost records or delays in receiving care.

Establishing a funding system in which the VA budget is created two years in advance would also ease the occurrence of such delays in providing medical care, Obama said.

The chairmen of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees have introduced bills (H.R. 1016, S. 423) that would allow Congress to adopt a two-year appropriations cycle. Currently, VA programs are budgeted annually.

Similar legislation was introduced last year, and advocates of the legislation say that by processing VA health care appropriations in advance, funding delays should be minimized and VA facilities would have a better accounting of their available resources.

If the proposed legislation were to pass, VA appropriators, beginning with fiscal 2011, would handle the budget for 2011 and 2012. Once in fiscal 2011, rather than appropriating for 2012, those dealing with VA spending would be addressing 2013 spending.

The budget resolution recently passed by the House and Senate calls for the largest single-year increase in VA funding in three decades, which should amount to about 25 billion over the next five years. Obama said the increases will go toward the expansion of mental health screenings, education benefits and programs for homeless veterans.