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FRA National President Slams iEHR Decision

FRA's National President Mark Kilgore, of Pensacola, Fla., outlined the Association's top VA priorities during a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on March 6, 2013. He asked the committees to ensure sequestration and the imminent expiration of the continuing resolution have no negative effects on America's veterans, and cited the existing backlog of unadjudicated disability claims and efforts necessary to facilitate a seamless transition between military and veterans' healthcare systems.

Kilgore summarized his personal experience with both VA and TRICARE health care systems during the past year as he dealt with bladder cancer and associated medical procedures and care. He characterized then-SecDef Leon Panetta and SecVA Eric Shinseki recent announcement that the departments are abandoning plans to create an integrated Electronic Health Record (iEHR) for active duty military and veterans as "not good" for beneficiaries in both systems. FRA shares concerns expressed by House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (Fla.) at a previous hearing that this change could be viewed as a step backwards in the quest to significantly improve care and support for our nation's veterans.

NP Kilgore also spoke in favor of expanding presumption for conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure for more than 500,000 so-called 'blue water' veterans and military retirees who served aboard ships off the Vietnam coast from 1964 to 1975, many of whom have health problems commonly associated with herbicide exposure. They have been denied benefits because they didn't have 'boots on the ground' and have endured lengthy legal struggles to prove their health problems are service-related.

Other issues addressed in the Association's full statement, available at www.fra.org, include support for joint DoD/VA investments in Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) research, authorizing Medicare subvention for the VA, suicide prevention programs, improving care for female veterans and restarting enrollment of Priority Group 8 veterans in the VA health care system.

About FRA

FRA is a congressionally chartered, non-profit organization representing the interests of current and former enlisted personnel of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. As the collective voice for all Sea Service personnel since 1924, FRA speaks on behalf of its members on Capitol Hill. There is no law protecting military benefits, so FRA is here to stand guard. In addition to its advocacy work on Capitol Hill, FRA also sponsors a national Americanism Essay Contest and assists its members with disaster relief grants.

The Association additionally sponsors an Education Foundation that awards scholarships to deserving college students and is a 2012 recognized charity in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC Code #80236). For more information on the FRA Education Foundation, visit www.fra.org/foundation.

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