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## **VA Down For The Count?**

*By Ernest Steadman*

Does anyone think that there will come a time when our veterans will no longer be able to look to our government for medical assistance, disability or any of the other programs currently offered to returning men and women in uniform? Think not?

What ever happened to “welfare as we knew it”? The echoes in national editorials calling for the abolishment or restructuring of Social Security into a private fund, and the subsequent actions by our government allowing illegal aliens the right to Social Security disability, retirement and other benefits after only 2-1/2 years of working versus the 10 year requirement for U.S. citizens? The changing of Medicaid into a program that, at the patient’s demise, allows them to confiscate any property they may have held worth more than \$25 thousand. And recently, the open and public demand by our government that States begin cutting back on their Medicaid involvement, thereby reducing the Feds share of medical expenses for the indigent.

After the stock market crash of 1929, veterans received nothing that was promised to them. In 1932, those demonstrating in D.C. were referred to by the media as the “Bonus Army”. And, on July 28, 1932, General Douglas MacArthur mounted a campaign against the Bonus Army using tear gas and live round fire against the improvised tent city of demonstrators. It was also young Lt. Dwight Eisenhower’s first command.

At the same time, the “National Economy League”, supported by the Chamber of Commerce and many influential people, was formed. They had both the ears of President Herbert Hoover and the man who would replace him, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Speaking on behalf of the League, Rear Admiral Richard Byrd referred to these veterans as “the privileged minorities”. Even so, Congress passed a bill awarding some \$2.5 billion to veterans of World War I. Massachusetts Representative William Connery called the Economy League a “child of big business” and said, “The soldiers’ bonus was

opposed by bankers, brokers, and big income taxpayers, mainly because they could see no percentage of profit in it for the Wall Street interests.”

One of Roosevelt’s first acts as President was to cut veteran’s disability allowances by 25 percent. He had this to say, “No one because he wore a uniform must therefore be placed in a special class of beneficiaries over and above all other citizens. The fact of wearing a uniform does not mean that he can demand and receive from his government a benefit which no other citizen receives.”

After more than a decade and a World War II later, President Harry Truman said, “The debt to heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid.”, and thus began the modern era of caring for our returning men and women in uniform.

What makes any reader of this commentary think that the “movers and shakers” in Washington who successfully got us to buy into “changing welfare as we knew it”, its continuing attack on the foundations of Social Security and Medicare won’t, when they have done with that, turn their attention upon our veterans?

We recently learned of how the VA is failing to meet the needs of returning service members suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Brain Trauma and Depression through a Federal Court Case in San Francisco, leading many veterans to commit suicide. Notwithstanding the lawsuit, the Disabled American Veterans have begun a “Stand Up For Veterans” initiative. They have launched a national petition drive to urge the President and Congress to “Stand Up For Veterans”. The petition reads the same as the one DAV is distributing to Congressional Members. By signing the Pledge, they agree to support legislation to:

Ensure proper screening and treatment the psychological wounds of our veterans, including post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Ensure proper screening and treatment for all veterans who may have suffered traumatic brain injury (TBI), using the most effective techniques and treatments.

Provide comprehensive support to family caregivers of severely wounded and disabled veterans, including access for family caregivers to mental health care services and financial support programs.

Reform the federal budget process to ensure sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans health care.

You can copy the above and sign your name to it or start your own Petition being sure to show each signatories' name, complete mailing address and Email account, if they have one. You can send these to DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters, 807 Maine Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20024.

As a side note, for all of the DAVs tireless efforts for veterans of all wars, they have editorially come out against pensions for World War II Mariners, even though on January 19, 1988, WWII Merchant Seaman were given veteran status and authorized to receive VA benefits. Apparently, those benefits did not include a pension which would be corrected by H.R. 23, one that DAV opposes.

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