

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES

FOUNDED 1899



WILLIAM A. THIEN
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

VFW MEMORIAL BUILDING
200 MARYLAND AVENUE, NE
WASHINGTON, DC 20002-5799

October 3, 2013

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

Speaker John Boehner
Rep. Nancy Pelosi
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Majority Leader Harry Reid
Sen. Mitch McConnell
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. President, Speaker Boehner, Representative Pelosi, Leader Reid and Senator McConnell:

The United States federal government is ending **Day Three** of a shutdown that both political parties created. On behalf of 22 million veterans and 2.3 million service members and their families, I urge all of you to start doing what's best for the country and not your own political interests. Every American is or will feel the effects of this budget impasse, but I am writing to you concerning the effects on our nation's veterans, our military personnel and their families.

The lack of a budget prevents countless veterans from taking advantage of transition assistance programs provided by the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor. The lack of a budget will increase the VA claims backlog, and stop VA disability compensation and survivor benefit payments to millions of combat-wounded veterans and widows because Congress won't extend the department's authorization into the new fiscal year. Many of these heroes depend on those payments to pay for their daily living expenses.

Our national security is threatened and at risk because of the lack of a defense budget and the ongoing sequester. Training is what makes our military the strongest in the world, but without a budget, aircraft are being grounded, ships are staying in port, and our Army and Marine Corps ground forces are not receiving the necessary training they need to successfully accomplish their assigned missions and, more importantly, to survive to do it again. We are also hearing the intelligence community is affected by the government shutdown, too. Haven't we all learned the lessons of 9/11? National Security and those who defend us cannot be shortchanged.

Over the past two months, the leadership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States has visited with NATO and American Forces stationed at a number of installations in Europe as well as stateside. We have met with VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, as well as the military and civilian leadership of all the military services. We have also met with senior enlisted advisors, who are closest to the pulse of our all-volunteer force. They

are all trying to keep a strong face on what is an impending disaster for their departments and to America.

We expect more from our elected leadership, and not a piecemeal approach that would use the military or disabled veterans as leverage in a political game.

This current failure in Washington by the elected representatives of the people is having a very real impact on America, and as advocates for all veterans, military and their families, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States demands that Congress and the Administration stop the political gamesmanship and do the job you were elected to do. Politics is the art of compromise and it is time for each of you to do just that.

All of America was disgusted about the Honor Flight veterans being blocked from seeing their World War II Memorial, which was supposedly closed because of the government shutdown, even though it, along with the Korean, Vietnam and Iwo Jima war memorials, are open-air memorials previously accessible to the general public 24 hours a day. Those WWII veterans showed Washington and the world why they are truly the Greatest Generation. No shutdown or political stalemate stopped them from visiting their memorial.

Congress has an obligation to provide sufficient, timely and predictable funding for veterans' programs and the Department of Defense. Under no circumstances should the veterans' or military communities consider short-term Continuing Resolutions as acceptable ways to best serve our nation's veterans or our men and women in uniform and their families.

Mr. President and to all Members of Congress, as the national commander of America's largest and oldest major combat veterans' organization, and on behalf of nearly 2 million VFW and Auxiliary members worldwide, we demand that you work together and enact a federal budget now.

We stand ready to work with any and all in order to ensure our nation remains strong, viable and secure.

Respectfully,



WILLIAM A. THIEN
Commander-in-Chief

cc: All Members of Congress