

of the returning veteran. We are happy to note that now the President has expanded that concept, which heretofore has often been frustrated by the attitudes of certain individuals in high places. Veterans who left high school to join the Armed Forces will be given greater assistance than ever before, provided they demonstrate a desire to improve themselves by attending school on a part-time basis under the GI bill.

Time lost can never be regained, but the programs approved by Congress will go a long way toward returning veterans to civilian life. Our organization rose to challenge the closing of 32 VA facilities in 1965. Congress having shared our concern, 17 of those facilities are still serving the veterans of this Nation.

Despite the continuing increase in the number of veterans, there nevertheless has been a reduction in the number treated on a daily basis in our VA hospitals. There are many reasons for this. There is one, however, with which the VFW particularly takes issue and I refer to the "economic means test," which is a strong deterrent to many veterans who actually need the services of these hospitals.

A year ago the Congress made provision for the use of VA hospitals on a beds-available basis by retired military personnel. These veterans are normally in far better economic circumstances than many civilian soldier veterans. They are not required to meet the "economic means test" nor should they be required to do so. However, the same principle should apply to the civilian veteran, who enjoys none of the benefits of professional military tenure. He also should be freed from the stigma and disability of this test.

We are also alarmed at the increasing evidence that medical care for veterans is not keeping pace with the high standards of university-type hospitals. The VFW recognizes this committee as the guardian of the medical program for veterans, and will be happy to join with it in any suggested effort to upgrade the medical program of the Veterans' Administration, including facilities, equipment, and the appropriation of adequate funds to recruit and retain essential medical personnel.

These, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee, are a few of our legislative goals for the current year. May I again express our sincere gratitude and deep appreciation for this opportunity to appear before you. Many of us will be visiting with you individually throughout the day.

And may we hope to return your hospitality in some small measure by playing host to each of you at our annual congressional banquet at the Sheraton-Park Hotel tonight. All Members of the Congress are cordially invited. The dinner will begin promptly at 7, with a somewhat more relaxing interlude commencing at 6. [Laughter.]

Thank you so much. [Standing ovation.]

Mr. TEAGUE of Texas. Thank you, Commander.

Mr. Commander, I would like to tell you and tell this whole group that I have been around Congress for a long time and I think I know the committees of Congress fairly well. I think that I have the finest committee that there could possibly be in the Congress of the United States. [Standing ovation.]

There has never been a Republican-Democratic partisanship in this committee. Everything that we do in this committee is done on the basis of being dedicated to the good of veterans. You find a lot of com-