

We also feel strongly that the program, as it applies to dependent parents, deserves a review to determine its relationship to the changes in our country's standard of living.

The people we are talking about here have raised sons whose lives have been claimed by the military in time of extreme peril. It is a matter of common knowledge that this committee has, through a long period of years, fought for and produced a vast amount of important and meaningful legislation in the interest of veterans and their survivors.

We know this committee will continue to give this matter its considered judgment and compassionate understanding.

The subject of hospital and medical care services administered by the Veterans' Administration is one which consistently occupies the attention of the Disabled American Veterans.

While it is recognized that the VA medical program is of primary importance to veterans, it is also important to all American citizens because of its wide scope of operation, its research facilities, and the extent of its geographical coverage.

To enable the Veterans' Administration to maintain its position of prominence in the medical field, a long range, comprehensive program for improvement and modernization has been agreed to by this committee, by the Veterans' Administration, and by the Bureau of the Budget. The agreement provides that the sum of approximately \$100 million a year would be expended over a 15-year period to modernize and rehabilitate the VA hospital system.

This program is now nearly two-thirds completed. Up until the current fiscal year, the Appropriation Committees of the Congress had funded yearly amounts for construction purposes. However, in the year 1967 the authorized \$100 million was reduced by 50 percent and was again reduced by 50 percent in 1968. To add insult to injury, the VA appropriations for fiscal year 1969 contained no funds at all for new hospital construction. Continuation of the hospital modernization program was deferred in consequence.

We believe that any further postponement of the construction of vitally needed hospital facilities would prove costly not only in economic terms, but in human terms as well. Construction costs are rising at the rate of approximately 10 percent a year and additional delay can only further increase the ultimate cost of the modernization program.

I, therefore, urge this distinguished committee to renew its efforts to secure the necessary appropriations to adequately finance the VA hospital construction program. I pledge that such efforts will receive the full support of the Disabled American Veterans, not only in the best interest of providing urgently needed health care for our Nation's veterans, but also in the best interest of the Nation's economy.

The DAV was pleased indeed with the initiative taken by this committee last year, which produced legislation extending the benefits of the VA community nursing home care program to veterans residing in Alaska and Hawaii.

We are grateful, too, for your actions in the 90th Congress which helped preserve the Veterans' Administration status as an independent agency and protect the hospital, medical care, and other veterans' benefits provided by law. It was through your determined efforts that the VA programs were excluded from the drastic personnel and fiscal re-