

Statement For The Record
Vietnam Veterans of America



Submitted by

John Rowan

National President

To the

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Regarding

**VA Caregiver Support Program: Correcting Course for
Veteran Caregivers**

February 6, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Walz, and other distinguished members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. We appreciate the opportunity to submit our Statement for the Record on, "*VA Caregiver Support Program: Correcting Course for Veteran Caregivers.*"

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) provides a wide range of benefits including monthly stipends, reimbursement for travel costs, medical coverage, training, counseling, and respite care for post 9/11 caregivers of veterans who were severely injured during service to their country. Since implementation, the program has assisted thousands of disabled veterans and their families during their long road to recovery and independence. The program has encountered many challenges over the last several years, such as consistent application of the regulations system-wide, lack of standardization, and an overall misunderstanding of the program by the caregivers themselves. VVA has been a consistent supporter and engages regularly with the Department and other partners to ensure veterans and their families receive quality, consistent, fair, and transparent information and services while participating in the program. We are confident that the Committee is well aware of the shortcomings of the program and has worked tirelessly to address them. **However, we believe the most egregious shortcoming of the program is that of inequity. We strongly advocate for the program to be based on need and not generational, as it is today, thereby excluding the majority of the eligible veteran population.**

Several years ago, when the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, P.L. 111-163, was being developed, organizations such as ours were asked by the White House to support the legislation, even though it was categorically unfair. We did this based on the promise that an expansion of the program to veterans and caregivers of all eras would be forthcoming. To that end, we insisted that a reporting requirement be added to the legislation that would direct the Secretary to assess the feasibility and advisability of such an expansion. The report was issued, albeit two years late, and VA found that, indeed the expansion could be accomplished, and it would make the program more equitable, but not without additional resources. VA projected the cost between \$2 billion to \$4 billion in the first year. This was an estimate from 2013 and surely the cost has gone up.

For years VVA has supported expansion. The cost of the program should never be the sole barrier. After all, we have been funding the recent conflicts on a credit card for nearly 17 years and Congress just passed a \$1.5 trillion spending plan. Why is it so difficult to expand a program that would support our most severely disabled veterans and their families?

Aging Vietnam veterans are the nation's largest living cohort in the veteran community. Many Vietnam veterans are alive today because of their family caregivers who have been taking care of them for decades. Heretofore there was never any recognition of the fact that these veterans would either have had to enter into long term care or would have been on the street if not for the extraordinary efforts of these family caregivers. Either way the additional cost to American society would have been monumental, whether in fiscal costs or the societal cost of having many additional veterans institutionalized or among the homeless.

Mr. Chairman, we recognize that the expansion of this program will require a lot of money, but it pales in comparison to the sacrifices of the men and women who have served. As long as we as a nation send young men and women off to fight wars, in all corners of the globe, we will continue to create veterans and, because of some remarkable advances in military medicine and rescue, we will continue to save troops who would have perished in our war in Southeast Asia, just as we saved soldiers there who would have died in World War II. And what is good for the caregiver of a veteran of the Global War on Terrorism must also be good for the caregiver of a veteran of the war in Vietnam.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' five core values underscore the obligations inherent in the VA's mission: Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. These core values define who they are, their culture and how they care for veterans and eligible beneficiaries. VVA does not segregate these values based on what era a veteran served, nor should the VA, or Congress and we insist the Caregiver Program be expanded to all pre-911 veterans and their families.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for your strong leadership in holding this hearing, and for affording us this opportunity to present our statement for the record.

VIETNAM VETERANS of AMERICA
Funding Statement
February 6, 2018

The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans' membership organization registered as a 501(c) (19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

For further information, contact:

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JOHN ROWAN

John Rowan was re-elected to a seventh term as National President of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) in August 2017, at the organization's 18th National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana.

John enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1965, two years after graduating from high school in Queens, New York. He went to language school, where he learned Indonesian and Vietnamese. He served with the Air Force's 6990th Security Squadron in Vietnam and at Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, helping to direct bombing missions.

After his honorable discharge, John began college in 1969. He received a BA in political science from Queens College and a Masters in urban affairs from Hunter College, also from the City University of New York. Following his graduation from Queens College, John worked in the district office of Rep. Ben Rosenthal for two years. He then worked as an investigator for the New York City Council and recently retired from his job as an investigator with the New York City Comptroller's office.

Prior to his election as VVA's National President, John served as a VVA veterans' service representative in New York City. John has been one of the most active and influential members of VVA since the organization were founded in 1978. He was a founding member and the first president of VVA Chapter 32 in Queens. He served as the Chairman of VVA's Conference of State Council Presidents for three terms on the national Board of Directors, and as president of VVA's New York State Council.

He lives in Middle Village, New York, with his wife, Mariann.