

Ex-GI Aid Pledged By Nixon

Teams Set Up To Improve U.S. Benefits

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla.,
March 31—President Nixon today announced a series of steps designed to improve delivery of services to America's war veterans, with particular emphasis on helping the Vietnam veteran obtain education and find employment.

In a radio address from his home here, the President announced that he had directed the veterans' administrator and the director of the Office of Management and Budget to set up "a crack management team" to take a "hard look at the services" the Veterans Administration provides.

He also said he was establishing a new Domestic Council committee on veterans services to be headed by VA Administrator Donald Johnson and to include four Cabinet officers.

Finally, he said he was directing Johnson to tour veterans' hospitals to investigate conditions of the hospitals and clinics and to report to him within 60 days.

"We must all recognize that the Vietnam-era veteran needs far more help than we are providing," the President said.

The management team he is establishing, he said, must find out "if we can find a better way of counseling (veterans) on medical care" and if there is a better way to find training and jobs."

The President stuck by his proposal for an 8 per cent increase in education benefits despite demands by veterans and some members of Con-

gress for substantially more.

Veterans' spokesmen have demanded more than an 8 per cent increase and also have said that in view of the rising cost of tuition, which the President called "staggering," veterans also should be provided with tuition fees.

In recent weeks, veterans have been increasingly outspoken in their criticism of the VA and in their attack on what they call inadequate benefit payments.

While Mr. Nixon was speaking Friday at Ft. McNair to honor Vietnam veterans, some veterans' leaders were demonstrating on Capitol Hill. At the same time, five disgruntled veterans, who failed the day before to obtain a meeting with the President, met at the White House with James Cavanaugh, a member of the Domestic Council staff.

"Mr. Cavanaugh assured us that the administration will begin to respond to the fact that there is a national veterans' crisis in this country,"

See **PRESIDENT, A2, Col. 1**

PRESIDENT, From A1

said Ron Kovic, leader of the veterans' group, afterwards.

Earlier this month, the President proposed an 8 per cent increase in education benefit payments. If Congress approves the request, he said today, a single veteran with no dependents would be paid \$240 a month. Married veterans would get more.

While he said that major progress had been made by federal and other programs to reduce unemployment among veterans, bringing the rate below the national average, "there has been a slight upturn in their unemployment over the last three months."

"There are no doubt several causes—among them the problems relating to energy—but the causes are not what matters," the President said.

"What matters is this: the men who fought on the battle lines in Vietnam must not come back to job lines in America. We must redouble our efforts to help these young men and women find jobs."

The President recalled that at a recent White House news conference "one of the most spirited reporters in Washington, Sarah McClendon of Texas," asked him why some GI benefit checks were late arriving.

"That was a good question," he said, "and the next day I asked the Veterans Administration for an answer."

Each month the VA mails out more than 1 million checks, he said, and there are some delays.

"The reasons for the occasional delays are generally understandable, but they are of little consolation to the young men and women whose studies and family budgets are disrupted as a result," he said. "We owe it to our veterans to be absolutely sure that we're doing the best job possible for them."

Appealing to business and industry to employ veterans, the President said: "... Let us make sure that a grateful nation remembers them in deeds as well as in words."

The President went to Key Biscayne's Community Church this morning before delivering his radio address.