

VFW Praises President, Congress for Historic Veterans' Funding Increase

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WASHINGTON — America's largest organization of combat veterans is praising the president and Congress for providing the largest budget increase ever for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Today's request by President Bush adds \$3.7 billion to the VA's fiscal 2008 budget, which now totals \$6.6 billion more in discretionary funding than last year.

"President Bush and Congress are to be congratulated for this historic boost in funding," said George Lisicki, a Vietnam veteran from Carteret, N.J., who leads the 2.3 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

Lisicki said the VFW has long maintained that the true cost of war includes the proper care and treatment of the men and women who serve their country in uniform.

The VA budget increase, part of a fiscal 2008 omnibus package that passed in the House and Senate last month, was endorsed by the veterans' service organization community as well as the vast majority of lawmakers from both sides of the aisle. The funding is needed to hire additional mental health counselors, healthcare professionals and claims adjudicators, to continue advanced medical and prosthetic research, and to begin construction and infrastructure improvements.

The VA's discretionary budget has almost doubled under President Bush's tenure, from \$23.8 billion in 2002 to \$45.5 billion this year. Lisicki said the 91-percent overall increase is due to an aging veterans' population and to an influx of new veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but he said it also reflects a solemn commitment by the administration and Congress to care for America's veterans.

"I salute the president and Congress for making this additional funding available, and for their untiring support of military families past and present," he said. "This budget puts veterans first, which will help ensure the VA remains a world-class healthcare system that is accessible and responsive to those who may require a lifetime of care for their physical and mental injuries."

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