

VFW Applauds VA National Security Budget Requests

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is applauding President Obama for submitting a fiscal year 2011 budget that strengthens defense and national security, and boosts programs for veterans, servicemembers and their families.

Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis., said the president's vision tracks with key VFW legislative goals that advocate for a strong and secure America, and for ensuring that those who serve in uniform are properly cared for by a grateful nation.

“Our nation’s very existence depends on strong national defense and homeland security programs, and the men and women who selflessly shoulder that responsibility,” said Tradewell. “This budget recognizes the realities of fighting a war against a very dangerous, unpredictable and determined enemy.”

The \$60.3 billion discretionary funding request for the Department of Veterans Affairs is 7 percent above 2010 and 20 percent above 2009 funding levels. Key initiatives are to hire 4,000 additional adjudicators to shrink the disability claims backlog; to reduce the homeless veterans’ population; to construct new medical facilities in Denver and New Orleans; and to maintain a robust information technology program that will enable a 21st century VA to fully automate its GI Bill benefits system and create a seamless electronic record for military members entering the VA system. Other notable recommendations would enhance women veterans’ programs; increase specialized care for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury and other mental health conditions; and expand the national cemetery system into areas where 80,000 veterans reside within 75 miles of a potential VA cemetery. Also included for the first time was a request for \$50.6 billion in advanced appropriations for the VA’s fiscal 2012 budget.

The Defense Department’s budget submission of \$548.9 billion represents a 3.4-percent increase over the previous year, plus \$159.3 billion in additional funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Notable initiatives are improvements to military medical care and family support programs. Funding would increase for TBI and psychological care and research, as

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well as military family counseling and childcare services. The administration will not propose a Tricare insurance premium increase, but they did propose a 1.4-percent military pay raise, which if unchanged by Congress would represent the lowest since 1962.

The Department of Homeland Security would receive almost \$43.6 billion, a 4-percent increase over the previous year. The budget submission focuses heavily on safeguarding the nation's transportation system and on strengthening border security. High priorities are preventing terrorists from entering the country; improving security screening of passengers, baggage and employees; and improving the process in which illegal immigrants are detained and removed from the U.S.

"The president's budget will help protect our nation and take care of the men and women and families who defend her," said Tradewell. "We look forward to working with the administration and Congress to make this vision a reality."

More information on the VA, DOD and DHS budget submissions, as well as other federal departments and agencies, can be found on the White House Office of Management and Budget website at http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget_factsheets_departments.