

Budget Proposal a Starting Point for VA

VFW Commander is appreciative of the increase, but concerned about specific reductions

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is appreciative of the funding increase President Obama proposed Monday for the Department of Veterans Affairs, but he has some serious concerns about proposed reductions in programs ranging from construction and infrastructure to medical and prosthetic research.

"The VFW appreciates the proposed increase because it recognizes that the proper care and treatment of wounded and disabled veterans are ongoing costs of war," said Richard L. Eubank, who leads the 2.1 million-member VFW and its Auxiliaries. "Our concern, however, is that the total discretionary request of almost \$62 billion is just not enough for VA to improve all the programs and services on their watch."

The proposed VA budget for fiscal year 2012 is \$132.2 billion, of which \$70.3 billion is for mandatory benefits such as disability compensation and pension. The remaining \$61.9 billion is discretionary funding, primarily for the Veterans Health Administration, which represents about a 10-percent increase over FY 2010 funding, but just 3 percent more than the proposed but never passed FY 2011 budget.

In contrast, the Independent Budget recommends \$65.3 billion, or 14.4 percent above 2010 levels and 8 percent above 2011. The VFW coauthors the Independent Budget—now in its 25th year—with AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America.

The VFW national commander said there are budget highlights, such as proposed funding

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increases for medical services and support for women veterans and those veterans with psychological and cognitive health needs, as well as expanded caregiver benefits and veteran homelessness programs. But he also said there are funding reductions, most notably in construction, infrastructure, Information Technology, and medical and prosthetic research that can only be considered short-term savings.

"The average 60-year-old VA medical facility is not going to improve with age, military medical records will never get digitized for seamless transition initiatives, and new prevention and treatments will go undiscovered unless the VA leads the way," said Eubank, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Eugene, Ore.

"The VA has great plans to better care for women veterans and those suffering from Traumatic Brain Injuries and other traumas, but it takes funding, an infrastructure, and a commitment by a nation that creates veterans to fulfill its sacred obligation to care for them when they return home wounded and disabled,"

"With the President's budget submitted, the VFW now has a starting point to work with the Administration and Congress to ensure that promise is kept," he said.

The FY 2012 Independent Budget is available online at <http://www.independentbudget.org/>.