

Veterans Groups Urge Administration, Congress to Keep Promise Regarding Health Care Funding, Benefits

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WASHINGTON — Four of the nation’s leading veterans service organizations—AMVETS, DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), are urging the Administration and Congress to provide \$68.4 billion to sufficiently meet veterans’ health care and benefits needs. The recommendation is contained in *The Independent Budget* released today, and available online at www.independentbudget.org.

The *Independent Budget* notes that currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) remains funded by a six-month Continuing Resolution for the current fiscal year (FY 2013). This six-month Continuing Resolution, which expires in March, does not include the FY 2014 advance appropriation for health care, and leaves all other VA programs to operate in an uncertain and inefficient manner—a major concern highlighted in the report.

This year’s *Independent Budget* recommends the following:

- \$58.8 billion total for health care for FY 2014—\$1.3 billion more than what the Administration recommended (\$57.5 billion) in the FY 2014 advance appropriation last year.
- \$2.4 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration—approximately \$226 million more than the expected FY 2013 appropriated level.
- \$2.25 billion for all construction programs—approximately \$900 million more than the expected FY 2013 appropriated level and well below the true funding needs of construction projects that the VA must undertake.
- \$611 million for medical and prosthetic research, which is approximately \$28 million more than the expected FY 2013 appropriated level.

For the first time, the *Independent Budget* includes an advance appropriation recommendation for health care for FY 2015, recommending \$61.6 billion.

AMVETS National Commander Cleve Geer called on the Administration to request, and for

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Congress to fully implement, the recommendations of *The Independent Budget* in order to enable VA to meet the needs of America's veterans.

"AMVETS is particularly concerned with the needs of America's transitioning veterans, and urges legislators to provide for critical VA programs, including employment initiatives, to help our veterans find new careers during these challenging economic times," said Geer. "With more than 800,000 unemployed veterans, and nearly 12 percent of recent veterans searching for work, now is the time for this Administration and Congress to stand up for our heroes and ensure they are able to provide for themselves and their families."

DAV National Commander Larry A. Polzin added:

"The VA's efforts to streamline the claims process and eliminate the backlog are encouraging," said Polzin. "Veterans organizations have played a crucial role in developing a number of new initiatives being deployed, and we look forward to continued progress in improved accuracy and timeliness. But uncertainty about funding for the VA could have far-reaching consequences for our nation's injured and ill veterans and their families."

Despite reassurances by Congress, the veterans groups note that the VA remains threatened by efforts to reduce federal spending across all programs, and that any attempts to reduce funding for VA programs will lead to rationing of health care services and longer waiting times for claims decisions.

Paralyzed Veterans' National President Bill Lawson urged the following:

"Congress must keep its promise to our veterans and part of that promise is to urgently resolve this Continuing Resolution issue. The fact that Congress has not completed its appropriations work more than four months into the fiscal year is unacceptable as it has left vital funding for essential services such as health care and claims processing in limbo," said Lawson. "As we move forward, the best way for the Administration and Congress to honor the service and sacrifice of all veterans and their families is to fully implement the recommendations of this year's *Independent Budget*."

VFW National Commander John E. Hamilton stated:

"The Administration has for the past few years asked for less than half of what the Department of Veterans Affairs needs to modernize its aging infrastructure," he said. "Just as disabled veterans require more medical assistance as they age, so do VA medical facilities that average more than 60 years old. Though we have yet to see what the Administration is proposing for fiscal year 2014, we fear the weak economy will again influence what the Administration requests for major and minor construction. Therefore, we urge Congress to at least match *The Independent Budget's* bare-bones recommendation of a little over \$2.25 billion for VA construction programs."

In its 27th year, *The Independent Budget* is an annual comprehensive budget and policy document, written by veterans for veterans, detailing funding requirements for VA. *The Independent Budget* aims to present a full picture of veterans' needs—and how government can meet these needs.