

Leading Veterans Groups Release Funding Blueprint to Address VA Issues

Administration's request addresses the health care and benefits needs of veterans

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WASHINGTON--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Four of the nation's leading veterans service organizations—AMVETS (American Veterans), DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans) and the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars)—released [The Independent Budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs: Budget Recommendations for FY 2016 and FY 2017](#). The report outlines projected funding requirements for the programs administered by the VA. *The Independent Budget* veterans service organizations (IBVSOs) are pleased to see that the Administration has committed to investing significant new resources to the VA, particularly for health care. The Administration recommends \$63.2 billion in total medical care for FY 2016 and approximately \$66.6 billion for total medical care for the advance appropriations for FY 2017, an amount that actually exceeds the \$66.4 billion advance appropriations recommendation contained in *The Independent Budget* (IB) report. The IBVSOs appreciate the fact that the VA may finally be directing sufficient resources to address the serious access problems and lack of capacity that have plagued the health care system.

The revised budget request for FY 2016 is especially welcome because the IBVSOs had been concerned that the funding levels previously provided through advance appropriations for FY 2016 were not sufficient to meet clearly increasing demand. *The Independent Budget* Report recommends \$63.3 billion for total medical care for FY 2016, about \$1.4 billion more than the \$61.9 billion Congress provided through advance appropriations last December. The newly revised Administration budget request for total medical care for FY 2016 is \$63.2 billion virtually identical to the IB estimate.

"It is a very positive sign that the VA is recommending real increases in funding for medical care for both FY 2016 and for FY 2017," stated Al Kovach, National President of Paralyzed

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Veterans of America. “However, it is imperative that Congress work with the Administration to address the shortfall in medical care funding that was previously provided for FY 2016.”

The Independent Budget Report also includes the following recommendations:

- \$2.8 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration—approximately \$263 million more than the FY 2015 appropriated level. This recommendation includes significant increases in staff in the Compensation Service and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program.
- \$2.8 billion for all construction programs—approximately \$1.6 billion more than the FY 2015 appropriated level.
- \$619 million for medical and prosthetic research—approximately \$30 million more than the FY 2015 appropriated level.

“In the past couple of years, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has made significant progress in addressing the claims backlog, but there is still much more that needs to be done,” said Ron Hope, DAV National Commander. “Congress must provide, and VA must allocate, additional resources to complete the modernization of VBA’s IT systems, increase the number of claims processors and expand the number of Board of Veterans’ Appeals attorneys and judges to address that growing backlog,” he said.

The IBVSOs believe that a concerted effort must address the monumental problems within the infrastructure and construction management programs. Recent reports about serious failings in construction programs—most notably in Colorado—leaves veterans wondering if any VA facility will be available to meet their growing health care requirements.

“The problems that arose from the Denver VA medical center project confirm that the VA doesn’t take its funding requests or its oversight responsibilities seriously,” said John W. Stroud, Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. “Construction funding requests have been totally insufficient for more than a decade, and the noticeable lack of attention hurts veterans who are trying to access care, and it wastes precious taxpayer money. The VA must become better stewards of all that it owns.”

Ultimately, it is imperative that VA invest new resources appropriately ensuring that veterans gain timely access to the best quality care, and receive ratings decisions that are done correctly the first time. The VA must continue to take positive steps to regain the trust of veterans who rely on the system after dealing with the scandal that embroiled the VA health care system for most of the past year.

“We urge the Administration and Congress to thoroughly review *The Independent Budget* and our policy agenda for the 114th Congress as they move forward to approve a budget for this year,” emphasized AMVETS National Commander Larry Via. “Our recommendations offer solutions to the access problems facing the health care system and the challenges

facing the claims processing system while also justifying funding needed to implement those solutions.”

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. The full report can be viewed online at www.independentbudget.org.

About AMVETS:

AMVETS—A leader since 1944 in preserving the freedoms secured by America’s armed forces, provides support for veterans and the active military in procuring their earned entitlements, as well as community service and legislative reform that enhances the quality of life for this nation’s citizens and veterans alike. AMVETS is one of the largest congressionally-chartered veterans’ service organizations in the United States, and includes members from each branch of the military, including the National Guard, Reserves and Merchant Marine. Learn more at www.amvets.org.

About DAV: DAV empowers veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America’s injured heroes on Capitol Hill; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV, a non-profit organization with 1.2 million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1932. Learn more at www.dav.org.

About Paralyzed Veterans of America: Paralyzed Veterans of America is the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. For nearly 70 years, Paralyzed Veterans has ensured that veterans have received the benefits earned through their service to our nation; monitored their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funded research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis. With more than 70 offices and 34 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans serves veterans, their families and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. (www.pva.org)

About the VFW: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is a nonprofit veterans service organization comprised of combat veterans and eligible military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. Founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, the VFW is the nation's largest organization of war veterans and its oldest major veterans organization. With nearly 1.9 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in more than 6,800 Posts worldwide, “NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.” The VFW and its Auxiliaries are dedicated to veterans’ service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs worldwide. For more information or to join, visit our website

at www.vfw.org.

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