

Leading VSOs Release 30th Edition of the Independent Budget

Veterans cite to 'strengthen, reform and sustain the VA health care system' as top critical issue

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WASHINGTON — Today DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) released [The Independent Budget Veterans Agenda](#) for the 115th Congress. The collaborative report, now in its 30th edition, outlines legislative and policy issues for the veterans' community and this year immediately precedes the annual funding recommendations for the programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Topping the list of six critical issues for the 115th Congress to address is the need to “strengthen, reform and sustain the VA health care system.”

“Veterans of every era of service, those injured in times of war and peace, those now in the civilian workforce, and those of us who continue to serve as veteran advocates rely on VA health care benefits of some kind,” explained Paralyzed Veterans National President Al Kovach, Jr. “While no one is denying VA has flaws, those among us who are the most catastrophically injured veterans, and who rely on VA health care for our very lives, urge policymakers to place the highest priority on sustaining specialized services. We all support this country’s obligation to provide lifelong, high-quality, accessible, comprehensive, and veterans-centric health care to all who served, and place emphasis on improving that care. The Independent Budget recommends integrated healthcare and benefits to all veterans as a common goal that the VA, Congress, the new Administration, private healthcare providers, stakeholders and veterans can and should work toward together.”

The Independent Budget (IB) veterans service organizations (IBVSOs) also list as critical issues:

- Resolving budget constraints that negatively impact veterans programs
- Reforming the claims and appeals process
- Realigning and modernizing capital infrastructure

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- Improving the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers of Severely Injured Veterans
- Ensuring that VA provides high-quality, effective programs and services to meet the unique needs of women veterans

“We have reached a defining moment in the process of reforming both the VA healthcare and benefits systems, in which Congress, the new Administration, and the VA must examine the most pressing needs of veterans and make decisions on sensible, lasting solutions to address them,” said DAV National Commander Dave Riley. “Modernizing the claims and appeals processes is a key part in ensuring veterans, especially those most severely ill and injured, are able to access their earned benefits as well as needed healthcare. Delays in adjudicating these claims are unacceptable, and Congress must adequately fund the Veterans Benefits Administration and move forward with appeals modernization legislation in order to ensure all claims and appeals are processed timely and accurately. For the hundreds of thousands of veterans currently awaiting decisions on their claims and appeals, and for all veterans in the future, we must get this right.”

Since the release of the IBVSOs last report in January 2015, the groups note significant progress on key elements of the delivery of veterans’ health care and benefits, but urge caution in the ongoing discussion about the role of community care in the delivery of veterans health care, stating “veterans’ access to care, including to non-VA community providers in the networks, should be based on the clinical need and veterans preference ... ”

“Choice Act funding expires this year, so it is imperative that Congress and the administration incorporate what works into the VA’s standard operating procedures as we move forward,” said VFW National Commander Brian Duffy. “Through contracted care, the Choice Act enabled the VA to serve more veterans in more areas than ever before, but it also highlighted weaknesses, such as chronic employee shortages, especially in clerical staffing, which forces doctors and nurses to file paperwork instead of seeing more patients. The Choice Act also proved that contracted care can complement but never replace the continuity and continuum of care that the VA provides to America’s veterans.”

For 30 years, the co-authors of The Independent Budget — DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) — have presented their collective budget and policy recommendations to Congress and the Administration. The recommendations are meant to inform Congress and the Administration of the needs of its members and all veterans, and to offer substantive solutions to address the many health care and benefits challenges they face. The FY 2018 and FY 2019 budget recommendations are scheduled to be released later this week, and will serve as the veterans groups’ benchmark for properly funding the Department of Veterans

Affairs (VA) to ensure the delivery of timely, quality health care and accurate and appropriate benefits.

To view the full budget report, please visit independentbudget.org.

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About Disabled American Veterans (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; assisting them with employment; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV, a non-profit organization with more than 1.3 million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U. S. Congress in 1932. Learn more at dav.org.

About Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans):

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 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. Learn more at pva.org.