

Leading Veterans Groups Release FY 2017/FY 2018 Independent Budget

Recommend \$84.4 Billion for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Feb 12, 2016

WASHINGTON--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--Today, 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 2017 and FY 2018](#). The annual report, which outlines funding requirements for the programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), proposes \$84.4 billion in total for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Administration's FY 2017 budget request for the VA is \$78.7 billion. However, VA proposes to spend an additional \$5.7 billion for community medical care previously appropriated by the 2014 "Choice Act", bringing total spending in FY 2017 to \$84.2 billion.

The Independent Budget report also includes the following recommendations:

- 72.8 billion for total medical care
- \$3.1 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration
- \$2.5 billion for all construction programs
- \$740 million for medical and prosthetic research

The Independent Budget (IB) veterans service organizations (IBVSOs) believe that adequate resources should be provided through the medical services account to ensure timely delivery of high quality health care. The groups are pleased with the Administration's overall medical care funding level for FY 2017 and the overall discretionary funding level, but believe the advance appropriations proposal for medical services in FY 2018, approximately \$54.3 billion, would be woefully inadequate to meet continually growing demand for VA health care services. For FY 2018, the IBVSOs recommend \$64 billion in advance appropriations for medical services. The veterans groups are also concerned about the massive growth in community care spending in FY 2017, totaling \$12.2 billion.

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“While the IBVSOs understand the need for leveraging community care to expand access to health care for many veterans, we are troubled by the rapid growth in this area of outside health care spending,” explained Paralyzed Veterans National President Al Kovach, Jr. “VA needs to ensure that it devotes critical resources to expand internal capacity, and increase staffing in the existing health care system, particularly for specialized services such as spinal cord injury or disease.”

Regarding General Operating Expenses, *The Independent Budget* recommends significant increases in FY 2017 funding for the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)—approximately \$3.5 billion, an increase of more than \$380 million over FY 2016—and for the Board of Veterans Appeals, approximately \$25 million more than FY 2016. The Administration has recommended approximately \$2.8 billion for VBA.

The IBVSOs are particularly pleased with the substantial increase proposed for the Board of Veterans Appeals. One related concern within the budget is a provision calling for a simplified appeals process to expedite adjudication of veterans’ appeals, which could potentially hinder due process rights for claimants.

“Both the VBA and the BVA have significant financial needs in order to properly adjudicate claimed benefits and services for veterans, and while still below the IBVSO recommendations, the Administration’s budget proposal is a good start toward maintaining the functionality of these two crucial areas,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Garry Augustine. “The provision in the budget regarding a simplified VA appeals process, however, raises many questions and calls for deeper discussions so we can ensure we protect the rights of every veteran who seeks and receives the benefits he or she deserves.”

The IBVSOs are also pleased to see the Administration’s commitment of significant new resources for the Medical and Prosthetic Research appropriation, requesting \$663 million, contrasted with the IB’s recommended level of \$740 million. The veterans groups are disappointed, however, that the Administration has decided to shift funds from the Medical and Prosthetic Research baseline instead of committing new resources to the Million Veteran Program, as the IBVSOs are proposing.

One budget area of grave concern to the veterans groups is Major and Minor Construction. While the IB recommends \$2.5 billion for all construction programs, the Administration’s budget request is just \$1 billion. Currently, VA has more than 30 major construction projects that are either partially funded or funded through completion, but in which actual construction is still underway.

The IBVSOs believe that a concerted effort must be made to address the monumental problems within the infrastructure and construction management programs, because the only people to suffer the consequences of these failures are veterans needing VA care.

“A primary contributing factor to the VA’s crisis in care over the past two years is the lack of the necessary infrastructure to support the VA’s main task of caring for veterans,” said VFW National Commander John A. Biedrzycki Jr. “Regardless of how many doctors you may have on staff, if they don’t have examination rooms, they can’t see patients, and that snowballs into tremendous wait times that destroy the confidence of veterans in their VA. This budget submission does nothing except put a temporary patch on a festering problem that cannot be ignored by the Administration.”

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. This budget serves 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 www.independentbudget.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; 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 nearly 1.3 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 eligible veterans and 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 1.7 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in more than 6,700 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. For more information or to join, visit our website at www.vfw.org.

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