

Leading Veterans Groups Commend President's VA Budget Submission

Critical boosts for health care, construction and IT funding highlighted

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WASHINGTON — The nation's top three veterans service organizations have released their latest edition of [The Independent Budget](#) to coincide with the Administration's fiscal year 2019 budget recommendation for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

For more than 30 years, the three *Independent Budget* co-authors — DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), and the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States) — have presented budget and policy recommendations to Congress and the Administration. These recommendations — which are supported by 27 other health, family, military, and veteran service organizations — are meant to inform lawmakers of the needs of all veterans, and to offer substantive solutions to address the many health care and benefits challenges they face. This independently-developed budget serves as the veterans groups' benchmark for properly funding the VA to ensure the timely delivery of quality health care and accurate and appropriate benefits.

Regarding the Administration's budget submission, the Independent Budget veterans service organizations (IBVSOs) commend the president's proposed \$12.1 billion increase over FY2018, citing much-needed increases in funding for VA health care, construction and information technology modernization.

Questions remain, however, over the availability of existing and proposed funding, as neither the House nor Senate have passed legislation establishing a path forward for the Choice program. VA also plans to change how community care obligations are recorded, which will result in a one-time funding availability of \$1.8 billion. Additionally, \$1.9 billion is to be carried forward into FY2019 from VA's FY2018 Choice program request. Due to uncertainty over the future of the Choice program, it remains unclear whether VA will actually have that \$3.7 billion of requested resources available in FY2019.

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The IBVSOs maintain Congress must provide the necessary resources to successfully implement any newly enacted community care legislation to ensure veterans receive high-quality and timely medical care from VA, and when necessary in the community. Additionally, the IBVSOs have concerns over initiatives in the Administration's budget proposal that would lessen one veteran's benefit in order to increase another's.

The IBVSOs fully support the Administration's request to increase funding for the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans Appeals. Along with processing disability claims, these organizations are key to the timely delivery of benefits and services, as well as the implementation of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act, which was signed into law last year.

After years of IB advocacy, the Administration this year proposed to more than double VA's major and minor construction budgets to address critical infrastructure issues. While the president's budget request for major construction remains \$617 million short of the IB's FY2019 recommendations, the increase in funding would still allow VA to begin construction on a number of key projects — including those which still lack funding for completion, as well as those which are critical to ensuring veterans are not exposed to safety risks at VA facilities.

Finally, the IBVSOs have for years recommended increasing the budget to enhance and modernize VA's IT infrastructure to maintain its world-class, comprehensive, integrated electronic health record (EHR) system. As component parts of the system become outdated, it is critical they be modernized or replaced in order to avoid situations like that which led to VA's health care access crisis. VA's request would transfer funds from medical care accounts and the Office of Information Technology to fund EHR modernization. The IBVSOs have recommended establishing a specific Veterans Electronic Health Record account rather than defunding other programs and priorities to fund this critical investment.

To view the full budget report and previous editions at www.independentbudget.org.

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About the Veterans of Foreign Wars: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is the nation's largest and oldest major war veterans organization. Founded in 1899, the congressionally-chartered VFW is comprised entirely of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. With nearly 1.7 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in 6,400 Posts worldwide, the nonprofit veterans service organization is proud to proclaim "NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS" than the VFW, which is 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.

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 more than one 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 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 33 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans serves veterans, their families and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Learn more at www.pva.org.