

VFW Reacts to President Trump's Budget Proposal for 2018

VFW applauds White House commitment to military and veterans, but says “more work lies ahead.”

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WASHINGTON – The White House released its fiscal year 2018 budget proposal today, outlining how the Trump administration intends to repeal budget sequestration for defense spending, as well as fund veterans' programs in the coming year. The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. applauded the President's commitment to properly invest in the men and women who defend our nation. However, VFW Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy was clear to note that this proposal was just a start to bolstering America's military and meeting the needs of the veterans' community.

“The VFW is pleased that President [Donald] Trump has lived up to his campaign promises to relieve our nation's military from the budget ax called sequestration, sustain our all-volunteer force, and provide for the needs of our veterans, but more work lies ahead for this administration to rebuild trust and confidence in our nation's veterans programs, as well as improve the readiness and morale of our military,” said Duffy, who leads the 1.7 million-member VFW and its Auxiliary. “Unfortunately, years of sequestration and short-sighted budget battles in Congress have left our service members without the resources and training it needs to protect our nation's interests, and we've seen over and over again how penny-pinching in the budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs has left veterans waiting far too long for the health care and benefits they have rightfully earned.”

The proposed discretionary budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs in FY 2018 is \$78.9 billion, which represents a 6 percent increase over last year's discretionary budget. The administration is also requesting \$3.5 billion in mandatory budget authority to provide funding to sustain the Veterans Choice Program.

The administration's proposed VA budget falls short of the recommendations made by the Independent Budget, which the VFW co-authors with Disabled American Veterans and Paralyzed Veterans of America, primarily because the Independent Budget partners believe

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that the \$3.5 billion needed to provide community care must be added to VA's discretionary budget in lieu of simply extending the Veterans Choice Program.

"VA must be allowed to use the \$10 billion it was given for the Choice Program," said Duffy, "but Congress and VA must consolidate VA's multiple flawed and confusing community care programs, not kick the can down the road by continuing to fund the Choice Program."

The VFW has conveyed concerns with the Choice Program and other VA community care programs through a series of reports on the state of veterans' health care, which can be found at www.vfw.org/VAWatch.

The administration's proposed budget would also alleviate the impact of sequestration on the Department of Defense budget and increase overall Defense funding. Ending sequestration for the military has been one of the VFW's top legislative priorities since Congress implemented the short-sighted policy in 2011. In 2018, the administration seeks to increase military funding by \$52 billion and requests \$65 billion to support Overseas Contingency Operations.

The VFW agrees that the arbitrary budget caps on defense spending created by the Budget Control Act of 2011 have depleted the military's ability to project American power and threatened the viability of the all-volunteer force.

"We are happy to see that President Trump stands with the VFW in our years-long push to end the irresponsible policy of budget sequestration and has committed to providing our men and women in uniform with the training and resources they need to protect American interests in an increasingly hostile world," said Duffy. "However, it falls short of providing DoD what it needs to meet the readiness demands of the current threat environment and counter the effects of the sequester, such as funding to repair infrastructure that has been left sitting for the past five years and conduct force maintenance and modernization."

Duffy went on to say that over the years, many of the cuts to Defense programs came on the backs of those who serve, and that the VFW looks forward to working with the administration and Congress to ensure a fully-funded military provides for the training and quality-of-life needs of our men and women in uniform.

Finally, the administration proposed a 21 percent decrease in Department of Labor funding. While the administration's budget outline did not specify which programs would be cut, the VFW wants to ensure that programs administered through Department of Labor's Veterans Employment and Training Service, or VETS, remain properly resourced to help veterans transition into the civilian workforce.

The VFW will now work with the administration and Congress in the coming days and

months to secure a quality budget for military and veterans' programs, fulfilling our nation's obligation to provide for a strong national defense and care for the men and women who answer the call to serve.