

Veterans Service Organizations Urge \$72.9 Billion Investment in Veterans' Health Care and Benefits

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Washington, DC—Four of the nation's leading veterans service organizations—AMVETS, DAV, Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)—are urging the Administration and Congress to provide **\$72.9** billion to sufficiently meet veterans' health care and benefits needs. The recommendation is contained in *The Independent Budget*, released today and available online at www.independentbudget.org.

The Independent Budget for Fiscal Year 2015 recommends the following:

- \$61.1 billion total for health care for FY 2015—\$2.3 billion more than what the Administration recommended (\$58.8 billion) in the FY 2015 advance appropriation last year
- \$62.4 billion total advance appropriation for health care for FY 2016
- \$2.5 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration—approximately \$44 million more than the FY 2014 appropriated level
- \$3.9 billion for all construction programs—approximately \$2.7 billion more than the FY 2014 appropriated level and well below the true funding needs of construction projects that the VA must undertake
- \$611 million for medical and prosthetics research, which is approximately \$25 million more than the FY 2014 appropriated level

Of great concern to *The Independent Budget* coauthors is the serious underfunding of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) construction accounts. From FY 2002 through 2014, *The Independent Budget* recommended \$23.5 billion for major and minor construction, yet less than \$13.5 billion was appropriated to keep rapidly aging facilities safe and operational for the proper care and treatment of millions of wounded, ill and injured veterans of all generations and for the staff who serve them.

“World-class health care requires first-class facilities, but through 13 years of war, VA construction accounts have only received 57 percent of what's required, and we project VA will need to invest \$31 billion over the next decade to close its major and minor construction

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gaps,” said VFW National Commander William A. Thien. “Sixty-year-old facilities do not get better with age,” he said, “and continuous underfunding only makes construction more expensive, our facilities less safe, and jeopardizes the VA’s ability to honor its commitment to America’s veterans. We urge the Administration to request and Congress to appropriate sufficient funding to correct these deficiencies now.”

AMVETS National Commander John Mitchell added the following addressing the breakdown in the appropriations process and effect on VA operations.

“The significant delay in the Administration’s funding recommendations for VA in FY 2015 and the ongoing breakdown in the appropriations process are major concerns about how program funding may be impacted going forward, and will most certainly have a negative effect on all VA operations,” stated Mitchell. “Underlying the issues, are the accountability of our Congress and the Administration to not forget the sacred obligation they have to those who serve and protect this country. Our nation must remain steadfast and committed to ensuring that our military, veterans, their eligible family members and survivors receive their earned benefits in a timely and efficient manner.”

DAV National Commander Joseph W. Johnston stated the following addressing the need for appropriate funding of VA’s Information Technology infrastructure.

“We applaud VA’s progress during the past year in reducing the benefits claims backlog and putting in place a new organizational paperless claims process model, and we hope the Administration and Congress remain committed to providing the resources needed to continue this vital transformation,” said Johnston. “That means funding the proper staffing levels and providing sufficient training. Additionally, it is crucial that appropriate funding is provided to continue building and maintaining the VA’s Information Technology infrastructure.”

The organizations are also calling for the House and Senate to immediately consider and approve H.R. 813 and S. 932, legislation that would extend advance appropriations to all VA discretionary and mandatory appropriations accounts.

“The past couple of years have clearly shown the benefits to the VA of having the health-care system funded by advance appropriations,” said Bill Lawson, national president of Paralyzed Veterans of America. The VA health-care system has been shielded from the severe negative consequences of political gridlock that ultimately led to a partial government shutdown last fall. It is time that the rest of the VA is afforded the same protection.”

In its 28th year, *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.