



THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

A Comprehensive Budget & Policy Document Created by Veterans for Veterans

Fiscal Year
2015

Prologue

As the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continues to face the growing demand being placed on its health-care and benefits systems, it is incumbent upon Congress, the Administration, and veteran stakeholders to ensure that VA has all of the tools necessary to effectively meet those demands. This commitment must be accomplished in the face of continued pressure to control federal spending. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that meeting the needs of veterans of every generation is a solemn obligation and responsibility that cannot—and should not—be minimized.

The Independent Budget is a comprehensive budget and policy document created by veterans for veterans. This year marks the 28th year of *The Independent Budget*. We—AMVETS (American Veterans), DAV (Disabled American Veterans), Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW)—are proud to offer *The Independent Budget for Fiscal Year 2015* to review the critical issues associated with that important submission, to be released concurrent to the Administration’s budget for FY 2015.

The four co-authors, *The Independent Budget* veterans service organizations (IBVSOs), believe that our mandate has remained steadfast over the years: to ensure that VA provides—

- competent, compassionate, and consistently high-quality health care to all eligible veterans and to their eligible families and survivors;
- timely and accurate delivery of all earned benefits to veterans, dependents, and survivors, including disability compensation, pensions, education, housing assistance, and other necessary supports; and
- dignified memorial services to all eligible veterans, preserving our national cemeteries as shrines to those lost in or following service to our nation.

The Independent Budget is intended to be a reference and an instrument to inform and educate not only VA and its veteran stakeholders but also the general public, the Administration, and Congress about the most pressing issues affecting VA health care and benefits, and their timely and accurate delivery, as well as a variety of memorial services. These issues make up some of the greatest concerns facing VA and the veterans community, and our recommendations for improvements are provided in an effort to assist veterans in gaining and keeping access to services and benefits in a delivery system created solely for them.

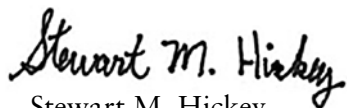
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We submit this document in the hope that legislators and VA policymakers will consider and incorporate our recommendations in developing legislation and making policy changes affecting VA in FY 2015 and beyond, and for developing advance appropriations in VA health care for FY 2016. We believe that by capitalizing on the strong foundation this budget provides, VA will be better able to improve its benefits and services and achieve operational excellence.

As our nation's government continues to be plagued by numerous fiscal and monetary challenges, especially in light of the pressures created via sequestration, continued efforts to reduce federal spending, and partisan gridlock, the IBVSOs are justifiably apprehensive about the future of VA funding and its potential effects on the vast array of programs that serve veterans. Ultimately, *The Independent Budget* co-authors strongly believe that veterans and their families who are served by VA should not be forced to sacrifice the health care and benefits that were promised to them and that they so clearly have earned.

In order to retain the valuable but costly progress made in these areas over the past several years, the IBVSOs will not support any backsliding on the outlay of funds needed for investment in essential VA programs and infrastructure. If the nation expects to continue to attract and retain willing and talented candidates to serve in the military, we must commit to providing the earned benefits and health-care services to those men and women who have made selfless sacrifices for the nation. We must emphasize that freedom is expensive not only to achieve but to sustain, and this cost is often life altering and may be life ending.

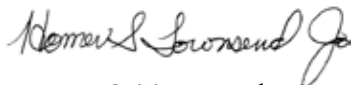
Our veterans have always stepped forward when we needed them to do the tough jobs, often in the worst conditions imaginable, and while making numerous personal sacrifices and enduring physical and emotional pain. Veterans have paid their dues in full. It is time that those sacrifices be repaid in kind.



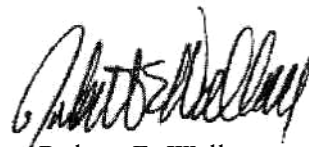
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The four coauthoring organizations have worked in collaboration for 28 years on *The Independent Budget* to honor veterans and their service to our country. Throughout the year, each organization works independently to identify and address legislative and policy issues that affect the organizations' memberships and the broader veterans community.

AMERICAN VETERANS (AMVETS)

Since 1944, American Veterans (AMVETS) has been preserving the freedoms secured by America's armed forces, and providing support for veterans and the active military in procuring their earned entitlements, as well as community service and legislative reform that enhances the quality of life for this nation's citizens and veterans alike. AMVETS is one of the largest Congressionally chartered veterans service organizations in the United States, and includes members from each branch of the military, including the National Guard and Reserves.

DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

The Disabled American Veterans (DAV), founded in 1920 and chartered by Congress in 1932, is dedicated to a single purpose—empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. This mission is carried forward 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; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life. DAV members also provide voluntary services in communities across the country.

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Paralyzed Veterans of America (Paralyzed Veterans), founded in 1946, is the only Congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely to serving the needs of veterans with spinal cord injury or dysfunction (SCI/D). Paralyzed Veterans' mission is to maximize the quality of life for its members and all people with disabilities. Paralyzed Veterans is a leading advocate for health care, SCI/D research and education, veterans' benefits, sports and recreational rehabilitation opportunities, accessibility, the removal of architectural barriers, and disability rights. Paralyzed Veterans is composed of 34 chapters that work to create an America where all veterans and people with disabilities, and their families, can achieve their independence and thrive. Paralyzed Veterans represents more than 19,000 veterans in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE U.S.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. (VFW), founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, is the nation's largest organization of combat veterans and its oldest major veterans service organization. Its 1.5 million members include veterans of past wars and conflicts, as well as those who currently serve in the active, Guard, and Reserve forces. Located in 7,900 VFW Posts worldwide, the VFW and the 600,000 members of its Auxiliaries are dedicated to "honoring the dead by helping the living." They accomplish this mission by advocating for veterans, service members, and their families on Capitol Hill as well as state governments; through local community and national military service programs; and by operating a nationwide network of service officers who help veterans recoup more than \$1 billion annually in earned compensation and pension.

Individually, each of the co-authoring organizations serves the veterans community in a distinct way. However, the four organizations work in partnership to present this annual budget request to Congress with policy recommendations regarding veterans' benefits and health care, as well as funding forecasts for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Supporters

African American Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Association
African American War Veterans of the U.S.A.
Air Force Sergeants Association
American Coalition Filipino Veterans
American Ex-Prisoners of War
American Federation of Government Employees
American Foundation for the Blind
American Military Retirees Association
American Military Society
American Psychological Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Society of Nephrology
American Thoracic Society
American Veteran Alliance
American Veterans for Equal Rights
Armed Forces Top Enlisted Association
Association of American Medical Colleges
Association of the United States Navy
Blinded Veterans Association
Cape Cod Veterans Inc.
Combined Korea-US (KORUS) Veterans Association
DC Office of Veterans Affairs
Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs
Easter Seals
Fleet Reserve Association
Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
Jewish War Veterans of the USA
Korea Veterans of America, Inc.
Louisiana Veterans Coalition

(Continued)

Lung Cancer Alliance
Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the Purple Heart
Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs
National Alliance for Eye & Vision Research
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Uniformed Service
National Association of American Veterans, Inc.
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Association of State Veterans Homes
National Association of Veterans' Research and Education Foundations
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
National Disability Rights Network
National Gulf War Resource Center
Navy Seabee Veterans of America, Inc.
Non Commissioned Officers Association
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
P-47
United States Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association
US Federation of Korea Veterans Organizations
VetsFirst, A program of United Spinal Association
Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association, Inc.
Vietnam Veterans of America

Guiding Principles

- ❖ Veterans must not have to wait for benefits to which they are entitled.
- ❖ Veterans must be ensured access to high-quality medical care.
- ❖ Veterans must be guaranteed timely access to the full continuum of health-care services, including long-term care.
- ❖ Veterans must be assured burial in state or national cemeteries in every state.
- ❖ Specialized care must remain the focus of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- ❖ VA's mission to support the military medical system in time of war or national emergency is essential to the nation's security.
- ❖ VA's mission to conduct medical and prosthetic research in areas of veterans' special needs is critical to the integrity of the veterans' health-care system and to the advancement of American medicine.
- ❖ VA's mission to support health professional education is vital to the health of all Americans.

Acknowledgments

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