

Prologue

As the global war on terrorism enters its eighth year and the conflict in Iraq approaches its sixth year, servicemen and -women continue to experience traumatic effects as they are placed in harm's way. Since fighting began in Afghanistan in October 2001, and in Iraq in March 2003, more than 4,000 service members have made the ultimate sacrifice and more than 40,000 more have been wounded. The sacrifices these brave soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coast-guardsmen have made will leave them dealing with a lifetime of both visible and invisible wounds. It is for these men and women and the millions who came before them that we set out each year to assess the health of the one federal department whose sole task it is to care for them and their families.

The Independent Budget is based on a systematic methodology that takes into account changes in the size and age of the veteran population, cost-of-living adjustments, federal employee staffing, wages, medical care inflation, construction needs, the aging health-care infrastructure, trends in health-care utilization, benefit needs, efficient and effective means of benefits delivery, and estimates of the number of veterans and their spouses who will be laid to rest in our nation's cemeteries.

As it becomes more and more likely that the global war on terrorism will be long, with dangers from unexpected directions and enemies who are creative and flexible in planning and executing attacks on our citizens and on our friends, our nation must continue to provide for those who serve in our defense. Additionally, we must be cognizant of the current fiscal realities in a time of turbulent and rapidly fluctuating economic conditions that may compel veterans of past service to seek health care and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

With this reality ever present in our minds, we must do everything we can to ensure that VA has *all* the tools it needs to meet the challenges of today and the problems of tomorrow. Our sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, husbands, and wives who serve in the darkest corners of the world, keeping the forces of anarchy, hatred, and intolerance at bay, need to know that they will come home to a nation that respects and honors them for their service, while also providing them with the best medical care to make them whole, the best vocational rehabilitation to help them overcome employment challenges created by injury, and the best claims processing system to deliver education, compensation, and survivors' benefits in a minimum amount of time with the greatest accuracy to those most harmed by their service to our nation.

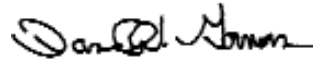
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We are proud that *The Independent Budget* has gained the respect that it has over its 23-year history. The coauthors of this important document—AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States—work hard each year to ensure that *The Independent Budget* is the voice of responsible advocacy and that our recommendations are based on facts, rigorous analysis, and sound reasoning.

We hope that each reader approaches this document with an open mind and a clear understanding that America’s veterans should not be treated as the refuse of war, but rather as the proud warriors they are.



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Supporters

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African American Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Association
African American War Veterans, USA
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American Coalition for Filipino Veterans
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Association of Specialty Professors
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Japanese American Veterans Association

Jewish War Veterans of the USA
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National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association for Uniformed Services
National Association of American Veterans, Inc.
National Association of Disability Representatives
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
National Society of Military Widows
Naval Reserve Association
New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Paramus
Non Commissioned Officers Association of the USA
Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs
Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs
Society of Cuban American Veterans
Society of Hispanic Veterans
Title II Community AIDS National Network
United Spinal Association
United States Coast Guard CPOA/CGEA
United States Federation of Korea Veterans Organization
US-Korea Allies Council
Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association
Vietnam Veterans of America
Washington State, Office of the Governor
Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs

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).
- ❖ 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.

Dedication

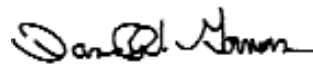
The veterans service organizations that collectively author *The Independent Budget* wish to acknowledge and express our deep appreciation to Mr. Richard Fuller for his guidance and many contributions to this document over the years. Richard, who worked for Paralyzed Veterans of America for almost 20 years, died in February 2008 after a prolonged illness.

A tireless advocate for veterans, Richard dedicated himself to ensuring that all men and women who have served in the uniform of this nation have access to the highest quality health care and receive the benefits to which they are entitled. For many years as the lead author of the Medical Care section of *The Independent Budget*, Richard worked to ensure the document reflected the highest degree of professionalism, technical expertise, and compassion.

Richard embodied the true meaning of “citizen soldier.” A graduate of Duke University; a veteran of the United States Air Force with service in Vietnam, Thailand, and Okinawa as a Vietnamese linguist; and as an advocate for his fellow service members his entire professional life, he set a standard for excellence and dedication that will remain at the heart of *The Independent Budget*.



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Table of Contents

Prologue	i
FY 2010 <i>Independent Budget Supporters</i>	iii
Guiding Principles	v
Dedication	vii
Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction	1
Benefit Programs	3
Compensation and Pensions	4
Compensation	4
Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustment	4
Full Cost-of-Living Adjustment for Compensation	4
Standard for Service Connection	5
Standard for Determining Combat-Veteran Status	6
Concurrent Receipt of Compensation and Military Retired Pay	9
Continuation of Monthly Payments for All Compensable Service-Connected Disabilities	9
Mental Health Rating Criteria	10
More Equitable Rules for Service Connection of Hearing Loss and Tinnitus	11
Compensable Disability Rating for Hearing Loss Necessitating a Hearing Aid	11
Temporary Total Compensation Awards	12
Pensions	13
Pension for Nonservice-Connected Disability	13
Dependency and Indemnity Compensation	13
Increase of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for Surviving Spouses of Service Members	13
Repeal of Offset against Survivor Benefit Plan	14
Retention of Remarried Survivors' Benefits at Age 55	14
Readjustment Benefits	15
Housing Grants 15	
Grant for Adaptation of Second Home	15
Grants for Adaptation of Homes for Veterans Living in Family-Owned Temporary Residences	15
Automobile Grants and Adaptive Equipment	16
Increase in Amount of Automobile Grant and Automatic Annual Adjustments for Increased Costs	16
Insurance	17
Government Life Insurance	17
Value of Policies Excluded from Consideration as Income or Assets	17

Lower Premium Schedule for Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance	17
Increase in Maximum Service-Disabled Veterans' Insurance Coverage	18
Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance Coverage	18
Increase in Maximum Veterans' Mortgage Life Insurance	18
General Operating Expenses 19	
Veteran Benefits Administration	20
VBA Management	20
More Authority over Field Offices	20
Compensation and Pension Service	21
Improvements in Claims Processing	21
Improvements in VBA Training	23
Stronger Accountability	26
Investments in VBA Initiatives	27
VBA Information Technology and Staff Training Initiatives	27
Sufficient Staffing Levels	29
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment	30
Adequate Staffing Levels	30
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and Chapter 33 Offsets	31
Education Service	32
Adequate Staffing Levels	32
Judicial Review	33
The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims	34
Scope of Review: Enforce Fairness in the Appeals Process	34
Enforce the Benefit-of-the-Doubt Rule	34
The Court's Backlog	38
Appointment of Judges	39
Court Facilities	40
Courthouse and Adjunct Offices	40
Medical Care	41
Finance Issues	43
Sufficient, Timely, and Predictable Funding for VA Health Care	43
Advance Appropriations for VA Health Care	45
Accountability	48
Seamless Transition from the DOD to VA	51
Inappropriate Billing	56
Homeland Security/Funding for the Fourth Mission	57
Mental Health Issues	59
Mental Health Services	59
OEF/OIF Issues	69
The Challenge of Caring for Our Newest War Veterans	69
Access Issues	77
Timely Access to VA Health Care	77
Community-Based Outpatient Clinics	81

Veterans’ Rural Health Care	83
VA’s New Health-Care Facility Leasing Program	88
Waiver of Health-Care Copayments and Fees for Catastrophically Disabled Veterans	89
Non-VA Emergency Services	90
Specialized Services	91
Prosthetics and Sensory Aids	91
Continuation of Centralized Prosthetics Funding	91
Assessment of “Best Practices” to Improve Quality and Accuracy of Prosthetics Prescriptions	93
Restructuring of Prosthetics Programs	94
Failure to Develop Future Prosthetics Staff	95
Prosthetics Sensory Aids and Research	96
Amputation System of Care	97
Hearing Loss and Tinnitus	98
Special Needs Veterans	100
Blinded Veterans	100
Spinal Cord Dysfunction	103
Persian Gulf War Veterans	105
Lung Cancer Screening and Early Disease Management Program	108
Women Veterans’ Health and Health-Care Programs	111
Ending Homelessness among Veterans	116
Long-Term-Care Issues	118
VA Long-Term Care Issues	118
VA Medical and Prosthetic Research	131
Funding for VA Medical and Prosthetic Research	132
Administrative Issues	135
Recruitment Challenges Facing the Veterans Health Administration	135
Attracting and Retaining a Quality VHA Nursing Workforce	140
Volunteer Programs	144
Contract Care Coordination	145
Non-VA Purchased Care	148
Centralized Information Technology Impact on VA Health Care	150
VHA Physician Assistant Director	156
Family and Caregiver Support Issues Affecting Severely Injured Veterans	157
Construction Programs	165
Construction Issues	167
Inadequate Funding and Declining Capital Asset Value	167
Increased Spending on Nonrecurring Maintenance	168
Maintain VA’s Critical Health Infrastructure	170
Research Infrastructure Funding	171
Program for Architectural Master Plans	172

Empty or Underutilized Space	173
VA Space Planning Criteria/Design Guides	174
Design-Build Construction Delivery System	175
Preservation of VA's Historic Structures	176
Career and Occupational Assistance	177
Career and Occupational Assistance Programs	178
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment	178
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Funding	178
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Productivity	179
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment National Survey and Performance Data	180
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Eligibility	180
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Independent Living Program Annual Cap	181
Follow-up on Referrals to Other Agencies for Entrepreneur Opportunities	182
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Counseling Partners	182
Building Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Partnerships	183
Veteran Entrepreneurship	183
VA Failure to Implement P.L. 109-461 Contracting	184
Veteran Surety Bonding	185
VA Vendor Information Page Database	185
Training Institute Inadequately Funded	186
National Cemetery Administration	187
National Cemetery Administration Accounts	188
The State Cemetery Grants Program	190
Veterans' Burial Benefits	190
TABLES AND CHARTS	
VA Accounts 2010	2
Price of New Vehicle vs. Auto Allowance	16
Unique VHA Patients—Enrolled Veterans and Total Outpatient Visits	41
Medical Services Recommendation	44
Financial Income Thresholds for VA Health Care Financial Test Year 2008	89
NPPD Expense Costs	92
Noise Levels—Common Military Operations	99
Cancer Mortality Rates	109
LTC-ADC VA's Community Living Center (Nursing Home) Care Program	121
LTC-ADC VA's Community Nursing Home Program	122
LTC-ADC State Veterans Homes	122
LTC-ADC for VA Noninstitutional Care Programs	123
Medical and Prosthetic Research (in millions)	132
Approved Construction Projects	166
Major Construction Account Recommendations	166
Minor Construction Account Recommendations	167
FY 2010 National Cemetery Administration	189