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Healthcare Among Top Problems Facing Veterans

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According to the New York Times, suicide rates of U.S. soldiers are higher than they've been in almost three decades. The economy may be one of the reasons why.

They've fought for the red, white and blue. Now these veterans fight to be heard. "Healthcare. It's always a main issue," explained John McNeill.

Even more uncertainty comes with a new Commander-in-Chief. "The Bush administration in the last eight years had the greatest increase we ever had in veterans healthcare. Significant increases. We'd like to certainly see that happen," said McNeill of his hopes for the new administration.

Yet in this economy it's a fight for every dollar. "There's always this issue of getting the adequate amount of funding. You're always competing with some other programs that are on Congress' mind," said McNeill.

Without help, many veterans can't afford the medical attention they need. "There's a lot of families that are having problems paying their bills. Even just buying groceries. Just having a hard time making ends meet," Carol Thompson, President of the Nebraska Ladies Auxillary of the VFW, explained.

Many soldiers battle post-traumatic stress disorder. According to the New York Times that along with financial worries (among other things) has led to the highest suicide rate since the Vietnam War. McNeill said, "The one big issue is the unseen wounds, like traumatic brain injury, that were concerned about now."

The crunch also limits the VFW's work, advocating for better health care and serving soldiers returning home. "We rely heavily on donations. The impact there, obviously people are starting to look at where I can donate and where I can't donate and that is a concern for us," McNeill said.

Years after serving their country these veterans hope Washington returns the favor.

Reporter's Notes by Laurie Dutcher:

The Veterans of Foreign Wars held their statewide convention this weekend in Grand Island.

For help for veterans check out the [Veterans Help Network](#).

Or contact your local VFW:

Kearney (308) 234-9714

Grand Island (308) 381-1555

Hastings (402) 463-1262

Or to find another VFW [click here](#).

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\$3.6 billion hike urged for VA health care

By Rick Maze - Staff writer

Posted : Friday Feb 6, 2009 15:11:06 EST

Four leading veterans groups called Friday for a \$4.5 billion increase in veterans programs, including \$3.6 billion for health care.

This is an even bigger increase than the groups asked for a year ago, and puts added pressure on President Barack Obama to keep campaign promises for full funding of Veterans Affairs Department programs.

The increase, which would result in a \$54.6 billion discretionary VA budget, comes in the so-called "independent budget" prepared each year by AmVets, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The \$54.6 billion budget includes health care, administrative and construction funds and some costs related to the administration of benefits, but not the costs of the benefits themselves.

Recommendations made in the independent budget often become a benchmark used by members of Congress to judge the adequacy of administration budget requests. Its timing — before the Obama administration makes its first budget submission — sets the stage for criticism if Obama asks for an increase of less than \$3.6 billion.

This is the 23rd year that veterans' groups have joined efforts to craft a combined budget recommendation.

Randy Pleva Sr., Paralyzed Veterans of America president, said the four organizations "urge" Obama to adopt the independent budget recommendations. "It is good for veterans. It is good for the economy. It is good for America," he said in a statement.



In addition to the health care increase, the budget calls for increases in funding for information technology, the National Cemetery Administration, the VA inspector general's office, administrative costs for processing benefits claims and a \$2 billion increase in construction money.

The big increase in major and minor construction is an effort to reduce a backlog of infrastructure needs, according to the veterans groups.

Part of the health care increase would be used to lease facilities for outpatient care, said Glen Gardner, VFW national commander.

"Forcing disabled veterans to travel great distances because their local VA medical center dropped inpatient care is not the proper way to care for America's veterans," Gardner said.

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