

The Department of Veterans Affairs Budget: Fiscal Year (FY) 2009

Message points: Below are The American Legion's Budget Recommendations for FY 2009

Program	Current Funding for FY 2007	FY 2008 President's Budget Request	House Passed HR 2642	The American Legion's FY 2009 Recommendations
Total Medical Care Including:	\$32.4 billion	\$34.6 billion	\$37 billion	\$38.4 billion
• <i>Medical Facilities</i>	\$3.6 billion	\$3.6 billion	\$4.1 billion	(Includes Medical and Prosthetics Research)
• <i>Medical Services</i>	\$25.5 billion	\$27.2 billion	\$28.9 billion	
• <i>Medical Administration</i>	\$3.2 billion	\$3.4 billion	\$3.6 billion	
• <i>Medical & Prosthetics Research</i>	\$412 million	\$411 million	\$412 million	
Medical Care Collections	(\$2.2 billion)	(\$2.4 billion)	(\$2.4 billion)	\$2.1 billion *
Information Technology	\$1.2 billion	\$1.9 billion	\$1.9 billion	\$2.3 billion
Construction				
• Major	\$399 million	\$727 million	\$1.4 billion	\$560 million
- CARES				\$1 billion
• Minor	\$200 million	\$233 million	\$615 million	\$485 million
State Extended Care Facilities	\$85 million	\$85 million	\$165 million	\$275 million
State Veterans' Cemeteries	\$32 million	\$32 million	\$37 million	\$45 million
NCA Operations	\$161 million	\$167 million	\$170 million	\$228 million
General Administration	\$1.5 billion	\$1.5 billion	\$1.6 billion	\$2.8 billion

Issue: Annual State of VA Medical Facilities Report

Resolution No. 206-2004 National Convention

Message Points:

- The first hand information gained through site visits by the National Commander to VA Medical Centers across the nation has proven invaluable in The American Legion's efforts to urge Congress and the Administration to fully fund VA at a level that will enable all eligible veterans to receive quality health care in a timely manner.
- The American Legion will continue to visit VA Medical Centers and health care facilities nationwide and provide full reports of all findings. By 2005, we had finished a complete survey of all VA medical centers. In fiscal year 2006, we revisited some of the medical centers and Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs). The 2007 report focused on services provided by Vet Centers that were located near demobilization sites and various Polytrauma sites (polytrauma rehabilitation centers and polytrauma network sites).
- The information gathered in these reports, coupled with the answers to questionnaires filled out by VA facility leadership is compiled in a final "State of VA Facilities Report".
- The fifth National Commander's "State of VA Medical Facilities Report" will be presented to Congress and the Administration in October 2007.

Issue: Capital Asset Realignment For Enhanced Services-CARES

Resolution No. 432-2004 National Convention

Message Points:

- Since the beginning of the CARES process, The American Legion has been involved at the local, state and national levels.
- The American Legion will remain involved in the CARES implementation process at the local, state and national levels.
- The CARES implementation process must be an open and transparent process that continually and fully informs the veterans Service Organizations of CARES initiatives, criteria, proposals and time frames.

Issue: Assured Funding for VA Medical Care

Resolution No. 254-2006 National Convention

Message Points:

- The American Legion strongly urges Congress to designate VA health care as a mandatory spending item within the Federal Budget.
- VA health care is the only major Federal health care program that isn't funded through a fixed formula. Medicare, Medicaid and military and Federal employee health care are funded through mandatory appropriations.
- Designating VA health care as a mandatory account would base annual funding on the actual number of veterans who are enrolled as of July 1 of each year
- Mandatory funding is one component of a combination of funding mechanisms that will ensure improved funding for VA health care.

Issue: Medicare Reimbursement for VA

Resolution No. 135 -2006 National Convention

Message Points:

- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) continues to seek other revenue streams to supplement annual federal appropriations.
- VHA is authorized to bill, collect and retain payments from enrolled veterans and their health insurance insurers for inpatient and outpatient care, outpatient medications, and long-term care services, except Medicare.
- Medicare is a prepaid, federally mandated health insurance program for all eligible Americans.
- Medicare-eligible veterans should have the same opportunity as every other Medicare participant, to use their Medicare coverage in the health plan of their choice.
- The American Legion continues to urge Congress to pass the necessary legislation to allow Medicare Reimbursement to VA for the treatment of non-service connected conditions of enrolled veterans.
- The Indian Health Service has demonstrated the ability to bill and collect Medicare Reimbursement.

Issue: Licensing and Certification

Resolution No. 373 – 2006 National Convention

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports efforts to eliminate employment barriers that impede the transfer of military job skills to the civilian labor market.
- The Armed Forces and the Department of Defense must take appropriate steps to ensure that at the time of training, service members are informed about any licensure or certification they may be required to meet when they enter the civilian workforce.
- The American Legion supports making the Montgomery GI Bill eligibility available to pay for all necessary civilian license and certification examination requirements, including necessary preparatory courses.
- The American Legion supports efforts to increase the civilian labor market's acceptance of the occupational training provided by the military.

Issue: Veterans Education Benefits

Resolutions No. 137, 246, 365, 372 – 2006 National Convention 38, 39, 40 2006 Fall NEC
13 – 2007 Spring NEC

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports that Congress should move Montgomery GI Bill- Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR) from Title 10, the United States Code (USC) to Title 38 USC,
- The American Legion supports that Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has administrative authority for both the MGIB and the MGIB-SR,
- The American Legion supports that the annual appropriations for the MGIB and the MGIB-SR become one annual appropriation within the VA,
- The American Legion supports eliminating the ten-year delimiting period for veterans to use Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits,
- The American Legion supports legislation that would allow all Reservists and National Guard members to use their Selected Reserve Montgomery GI Bill benefits for up to ten years after separation,
- The American Legion supports that VA creates an MGIB-SR participant reimbursement rate adjusted for time spent on Federalization activation, State activation, and normal service for a period not to exceed 36 months
- The American Legion supports that the dollar amount of the entitlement should be indexed to the average cost of college education including tuition, fees, textbooks and other supplies for a commuter student at an accredited university, college or trade school for which they qualify,
- The American Legion supports that the educational cost index should be reviewed and adjusted annually,
- The American Legion supports that if a veteran enrolled in the MGIB acquired educational loans prior to enlisting in the Armed Forces, MGIB benefits may be used to repay existing educational loans,
- The American Legion supports that a monthly tax-free subsistence allowance indexed for inflation must be part of the educational assistance package,

- The American Legion supports support the transfer of Montgomery GI Bill benefits from a veteran to their immediate family members if the veteran elects to do so.
- The American Legion supports that enrollment in the MGIB shall be automatic upon enlistment, however, benefits will not be awarded unless eligibility criteria have been met,
- The American Legion supports that if a veteran enrolled in the MGIB becomes eligible for training and rehabilitation under Chapter 31 of Title 38, United States Code, the veteran shall not receive less educational benefits than otherwise eligible to receive under MGIB,
- The American Legion supports that the current military payroll deduction (\$1200) required for enrollment in MGIB must be terminated,
- The American Legion supports that a veteran may request an accelerated payment of all monthly educational benefits upon meeting the criteria for eligibility for MGIB financial payments, with the payment provided directly to the educational institution,
- The American Legion supports efforts to convince state and federal lawmakers that activated veterans should not be charged interest and penalties for students loans while serving in an activated capacity,
- The American Legion supports that the Department of Education must abide by the Service Members Relief Act to include that penalties and interest do not accrue while the veteran is activated or when the veteran has returned to US and is now a disabled veteran,
- The American Legion supports that separating service members and veterans seeking a license or credential must be able to use MGIB educational benefits to pay for the cost of taking any written or practical test or other measuring device,
- The American Legion supports making the Montgomery GI Bill eligibility available to pay for all necessary civilian license and certification examination requirements, including necessary preparatory courses,
- The American Legion supports that any veteran with six years of service will be qualified to transfer education entitlements upon re-enlistment for four years.
- The American Legion supports an effort to amend Title 38 to restore the reimbursement rate for correspondence and distance learning training to 90% of tuition,
- The American Legion supports that the Department of Defense be authorized to continue its practice to offer Recruitment and Retention incentives, such as college funds, enlistment bonuses, re-enlistment bonuses, and loan repayments,

- The American Legion supports legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, Section 3017, to provide for payment of the \$1200 death benefit during the 10 year eligibility period in the event of a catastrophic disability or death, not the result of the veteran's willful misconduct,
- The American Legion supports all efforts to convince state and federal lawmakers that service-connected disabled veterans not be charged interest and penalties by the Department of Education or its designee,
- The American Legion supports amending the Federal Student Financial Aid 'means test' to make exempt a recently discharged veteran's prior year income towards receiving federal financial aid.

Issue: Support for Homeless Veterans Programs

Resolution No. 374 – 2006 National Convention 14 – 2007 Spring NEC, 100 – 2007 National Convention

Message Points:

- The American Legion will seek and support any legislative or administrative proposal that will provide medical, rehabilitative and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families.
- The American Legion will urge Congress to provide adequate resources to insure the future of the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program, the Homeless Domiciliary Program and the Compensated Work Therapy Rehabilitation Program.
- The American Legion supports funding for vouchers for the HUD-VASH program be set aside and transferred to the VA Secretary from amounts made available for rental assistance under the Housing Choice Voucher program.
- The American Legion supports the creation of a program by Congress for returning combat veterans similar to Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), for housing upon return from mobilization for 180 days.

Issue: Support Small Business Services for America's Veteran Entrepreneurs

Resolution No. 127 – 2006 National Convention, 91, 180, 181 – 2007 National Convention

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports the efforts of the Small Business Administration's Office of Veterans' Business Development in its initiatives to provide enhanced outreach to veterans.
- The American Legion will seek legislation that would permit the Office of Veterans' Business Development to enter into contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements to further its goals.
- The American Legion supports the Small Business Administration's efforts to provide entrepreneurial information to all service members who are separating from the military.
- The American Legion That any veteran business development assistance should include funding to assist Federal agencies in reaching their 5% veteran procurement goals.
- The American Legion seeks to develop a user-friendly veteran procurement database for use by all Federal government agencies
- The American Legion supports that the Federal government and the Department of Defense utilize its available technology to create, fund and support a veteran procurement-spending database within the Department of Defense that would finally bring veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses on equal footing with all other small business special interest groups when it comes to Federal procurement opportunities.
- The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to require a reasonable set-aside of federal procurements and contracts for businesses owned and operated by Veterans and for those Veteran businesses affected by base closings and reduction in our military forces.
- The American Legion supports that the Small Business Administration and Congress make funding available to reinstate the Veteran's Entrepreneur Training Program grants to help those who are in need to return to productive civilian professions.

Issue: Support Transitioning Service Members and Department of Labor Veterans and Employment Training Service

Resolution No. 20, 23, 51, 52, 203, 204, 209 – 2006 National Convention, 15 – Spring 2007
NEC

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports full funding and staffing for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service and its effective programs.
- The American Legion supports legislation that will restore language to Chapter 41, Title 38 that require that half time DVOP/LVER positions be assigned only after approval of the DVET, and that the Secretary of Labor be required to monitor all career centers that have veteran staff assigned.
- The American Legion supports legislation that restores the duties and responsibilities of the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans Employment Representative to include case management, outreach to veterans and job development.
- The American Legion opposes the utilization of DVOP/LVER to work with, or process public assistance programs.
- The American Legion supports that the Congress reinforce the mandate of the program to assist veterans with their employment and training needs and whenever possible provide veterans benefit information as a part of their service to the veteran customers.
- The American Legion strongly support of the Transition Assistance Program and that the Department of Defense require all separating, active-duty service members, including those from Reserve and National Guard units, be given an opportunity to participate in Transition Assistance Program training not more than 180 days prior to their separation or retirement from the armed forces.
- The American Legion seeks and support legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, to require Veterans Employment and Training Service Regional Administrators, State Directors and Assistant State Directors and "other professional staff" under VETS to be veterans of the Armed Services.
- The American Legion seeks and supports a revision of existing Veterans' Employment and Training Service reporting requirements for measuring performance standards and for determining compliance with requirements for providing employment services to veterans

- The American Legion supports national legislation that will require LVER and DVOP staff be veterans and serve only veterans, and that the assignment of these positions to local one stop centers be based on veteran populations.
- The American Legion supports legislation that will restore language to Chapter 41, Title 38 that will require that veteran staff serve only veterans, require that half time DVOP/LVER positions be assigned only after approval of the DVET, and that the Secretary of Labor be required to monitor all career centers that have veteran staff assigned.
- The American Legion supports that newly hired DVOP/LVER must be trained at NVTI within the first year of employment and that all untrained DVOP/LVER staff within 3 years of hiring at the time of enactment of new legislation must be trained within 1 year.

Issue: Support for Veterans Employment

Resolution No. 45, 232, 234 – 2006 National Convention

Message Points:

- The American Legion supports the strongest veterans preference laws possible at all levels of government and opposing any attempt to weaken such laws.
- The American Legion supports Congress establishing “Hire a Veteran Week” during the week of Veterans’ Day in the month of November each year.
- The American Legion supports that the President of the United States issue an executive order declaring “Hire a Veteran Week” during the week of Veterans’ Day in the month of November each year.
- The American Legion opposes the outsourcing of all Federal Jobs held by veterans and disabled veterans without the protection of Reduction in Force policies and veterans preference.