

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA,
WISCONSIN STATE COUNCIL
MARCH LEGISLATION REPORT
MARCH 18, 2023

MARCH 14, 2023 - The 2023 National Convention website is now active on WA's webpage. Check it out. You can download the registration form, contact the company for scooter rentals, review the agenda (which is updated often), see the candidate page (which is also a work in progress).



President Biden's Budget Honors Our Nation's Sacred Commitment to Veterans and Military Families

March 9, 2023 by Whitehouse - One of our country's most sacred obligations is to care for America's veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors. Last year, the President delivered on this commitment by signing the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT Act), the most significant bill in American history to address veterans' exposure to burn pits and other toxic substances. Under the law, more than 5 million veterans will be eligible for services, including expanded access to healthcare and disability compensation benefits. Under the President's leadership, the Administration has also taken action to address veteran suicide, advance equity across veterans' services, and expand access to specialized cancer screenings and reproductive health care.

The Budget builds on this progress with proposals to honor America's commitment to veterans and military families:

- **Expands Health Care, Benefits, and Services for Military Environmental Exposures.** The PACT Act represents the most significant expansion of VA healthcare and disability compensation benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits and other environmental exposures in more than 30 years. As part of the PACT Act, the Congress authorized the Cost of War Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF) to fund increased costs above 2021 funding levels for health care and benefits delivery for veterans exposed to a number of environmental hazards-and ensure there is sufficient funding available to cover these costs without shortchanging other elements of veteran medical care and benefit delivery. The Budget provides \$20.3 billion for the TEF in 2024, which is \$15.3 billion above the 2023 enacted level.

- **Prioritizes VA Medical Care.** The Budget provides a total of \$121 billion in discretionary medical care funding in 2024, \$2.3 billion above the 2023 enacted level, together with \$17.1 billion in the TEF. In addition to fully funding inpatient, outpatient, mental health, and long-term care services, the Budget supports programs that enhance VA healthcare quality and delivery. The Budget reiterates that medical care for veterans should be considered separately from other appropriations categories in order to ensure that the needs of veterans are never traded off against other national priorities.
- **Prioritizes Veterans' Mental Health Services and Suicide Prevention.** The Budget invests \$139 million within VA research programs, together with \$16.6 billion within the VA Medical Care program, to increase access to quality mental healthcare and lower the cost of mental health services for veterans, with the goal of helping veterans take charge of their treatment and live full, meaningful lives. This *effort* includes support for the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019, clinical trials, and epidemiological studies on risk and prevention factors. In addition, the Budget provides \$559 million to further advance the Administration's veteran suicide prevention initiatives, including continued expansion of the Veterans Crisis Line's nationwide 988 number for 24/7 support and additional support for VAs National Suicide Prevention Strategy.
- **Create a Housing Voucher Guarantee for Extremely Low-Income Veterans.** The President believes that no one should be forced to live on the street, especially not those who have served our nation. But an estimated 450,000 veteran renter households with extremely low incomes currently receive no rental assistance and have what HUD terms "worst-case housing needs." Over a ten-year period and at a cost of \$13 billion, the Budget expands rental assistance to extremely low-income (ELI) veteran families, starting with an allocation of 50,000 targeted vouchers in 2025 and paving a path to guaranteed assistance by 2033 for all who have served the Nation and are in need.
- **Honors the Memory of All Veterans.** The Budget includes \$480 million to ensure veterans and their families have access to exceptional memorial benefits. These funds maintain national shrine standards at the 158 VA-managed cemeteries and provide the initial operational investment required to continue or begin activation to open three new national cemeteries.
- **Invests in Critical Veteran Medical Facilities.** The Budget includes \$1.6 billion in discretionary funding and \$1.9 billion in mandatory funding for construction and expansion of critical infrastructure and facilities, in addition to a \$5 billion investment in discretionary medical care for non-recurring maintenance to improve medical facility infrastructure. In addition, the Budget provides \$164 million for grants for construction of State extended care facilities to deliver high-quality healthcare, benefits, and services for veterans.
- **Invests in Caregivers Support Programs.** Recognizing the critical role family caregivers play in supporting the health and wellness of veterans, the Budget provides robust funding for the VAs Program of General Caregivers Support Services. The Budget provides \$2.4 billion for the Caregivers Support Program, including the VAs Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, which includes stipend payments and support services to help empower family caregivers of eligible veterans.
- **Supports America's Commitment to Military Families.** Military families are key to the readiness and well-being of the All-Volunteer Force, and therefore are critical to national security. The Budget continues to support military families by prioritizing programs, including the Secretary of Defense's Taking Care of People initiatives, that directly support military families, caregivers, and survivors. Specific programming increases include the further expansion of community-based child care fee assistance, a public private partnership to increase child care capacity, and a reduction in parent fees for child care workers in order to recruit and retain staff. The Budget also invests \$20 million through the Department of Education to ensure military-connected children with disabilities and other highly mobile children with disabilities maintain services when they change school districts.
- **Expands Employment Protections for Military Spouses.** Military families make significant sacrifices on behalf of the Nation, including overcoming the many challenges that spouses of active-duty service and reserve members experience in finding and retaining good jobs. A Department of Defense survey found that 33 percent of military families had experienced a permanent change in location within the last 12 months. Spouses of military servicemembers often face discrimination from current and prospective employers due to the frequent and unpredictable nature of deployment and relocations. The Budget addresses these challenges by expanding anti-discrimination and reemployment protections to spouses of all active-duty and reserve members, which would allow them to more easily find and keep good jobs.

Troops would see biggest pay raise since 2002 under Biden budget plan

By [Meghann Myers](#) and [Leo Shane III](#) (from [MILITARY TIMES](#))
Thursday, Mar 9

Service members would see their [largest pay raise in 22 years](#) under a defense budget proposal unveiled by the White House on Thursday, which also includes increased [support for military families](#) continued implementation of military sexual assault prevention and response reforms.

The \$842 billion Defense Department spending plan for fiscal 2024 represents a 3.2% increase for military operations over current levels, one that administration officials said enables the country to keep pace with national security threats. Specific military priorities and purchases of the full \$1.7 trillion federal spending plan will not be unveiled until next week.

Thursday's unveiling of the Biden administration's budget is essentially a spending wish list that kicks off months of back and forth with Congress, the body that actually passes government budgets. With the House controlled by Republicans, the GOP has the power to block much of the outlined spending.

But the inclusion of a sizable pay raise for all troops starting in January 2024 is likely to win the support of both parties. Congress has largely gone along with the president's past military pay raise proposals, and on several occasions in the last two decades, lawmakers have voted to raise pay even higher.

Biden's fiscal 2024 budget plan proposal also calls for increases in allowances meant to ease economic burden for military families, including increases to the basic allowance for housing and the newly created basic needs allowance, which gives extra monthly pay to junior-ranking troops with large families.

"Specific programming increases include the further expansion of community-based, child care fee assistance, a public-private partnership to increase child care capacity, and a reduction in parent fees for child care workers in order to recruit and retain staff," are also included in the proposal, according to budget documents.

Under Biden's plan, military pay would increase by 5.2% next year, which would be the largest boost since a 6.9% average military pay increase in 2002.

The 2023 pay raise - which went into effect just over two months ago - was 4.6%. Combined with the 2024 proposal, troops would see almost a 10% increase in take home pay over a two-year stretch.

The raise is based on the federal Employment Cost Index, which tracks wages and salaries of private sector workers annually. It does not take into account general inflation increases Congressional critics have said the actual impact of the seemingly generous pay boosts for military families is minimal, because the higher costs of household goods and fuel aren't factored into the calculation. Inflation rates soared about 8% at various points last year.

For junior enlisted troops, the 5.2% pay raise would mean about \$1,600 more next year in take-home pay. For senior enlisted and junior officers, the hike equals about \$2,900 more.

STATE NEWS

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Tolly Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 9, 2023

Contact: GovPress@wisconsin.gov

Gov. Evers Announces Budget Initiatives to Support Wisconsin's Veterans

Governor Evers plan bolsters Veterans Affairs workforce, supports veteran employment, education, and housing security, expands access to veterans mental health service