

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 VVA'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 VA's 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 VA's Program of General Caregivers Support Services. The Budget provides \$2.4 billion for the Caregivers Support Program, including the VA's 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 childcare fee assistance, a public-private partnership to increase child care capacity, and a reduction in parent fees for childcare 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 and 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

State of Wisconsin sent this bulletin at 02/09/2023 07:45 AM CST



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 9, 2023

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

Governor's plan bolsters Veterans Affairs workforce, supports veteran employment, education,

and housing security, expands access to veterans mental health service

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced his 2023-25 budget will include several innovative proposals to serve Wisconsin’s veterans, building upon previous investments funded by federal pandemic relief aid based on recommendations from the governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity created in 2022. The governor’s initiatives announced today include funding to bolster the workforce at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), support veteran employment, education, and housing security, and expand access to mental health services for veterans.

“From creating our Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity to investing in employment opportunities, housing assistance, and increased mental health services for our veteran community, we’ve made important progress these last few years to ensure Wisconsin veterans have access to the support and resources they’ve earned and deserve,” said Gov. Evers. “Now, we’re continuing that good work in the upcoming biennial budget by proposing continued investment in various innovative initiatives to ensure the state is equipped to meet the needs of our veteran community and help them build strong, lasting success.”

Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration are committed to ensuring Wisconsin veterans have the tools and resources they need to thrive in their civilian lives. In his [2022 State of the State address](#), Gov. Evers announced that he would be signing an executive order creating a Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity to develop new, innovative initiatives to support the more than 300,000 veterans who live in Wisconsin. Shortly thereafter, Gov. Evers signed Executive Order #157 to create the Commission and charged the Commission with identifying gaps in existing services, areas in need of robust investment, and reducing barriers to economic security, including efforts to expand access to higher education and job training, address housing insecurity, and increase mental and behavioral health support and substance use disorder treatment.

Gov. Evers’ Blue Ribbon Commission gathered input from stakeholders, conducted listening sessions, consulted experts, and built sound and innovative recommendations to build a better Wisconsin for veterans. Following the release of the Commission’s final report in September 2022 and based on the Commission’s recommendations, Gov. Evers announced a \$10 million investment, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act, in veteran services across the state. This investment included:

- \$4.5 million to support veteran mental health initiatives, including supporting community-based programs, increasing access to emergency services, and investing in peer support programs.
- \$2 million to create a rental assistance program for homeless veterans. This was also a recommendation from the Interagency Council on Homelessness’ [“Welcoming Wisconsin Home”](#) report.

- An additional \$1.5 million for the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program (VORP), which provides case management and support to veterans and connects veterans to community services, including substance use treatment, housing, education, and mental healthcare. This investment is intended to fund seven additional positions to serve veterans across the state.
- An additional \$1.5 million for county veteran services offices (CVSOs) and Tribal veterans service offices (TVSOs), which help veterans connect to benefits, preventative programming, and family engagement activities. The funding will increase allocations to CVSOs and TVSOs by 100 percent, ensure TVSO payments are not being prorated, and increase payments to part-time CVSOs.
- An additional \$500,000 for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Hire Heroes Program, which provides services to veterans with high barriers to employment and reimburses employers for certain costs when hiring veteran employees.

Gov. Evers' budget builds on the investments recommended by the Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity, providing ongoing state support for these critical initiatives. A list of the governor's proposed investments to support Wisconsin veterans is available below.

Addressing Veteran Needs

To ensure the current and future needs of Wisconsin veterans are evaluated and that DVA can be responsive to changing demands, the governor is proposing the following through his 2023-25 budget:

- Providing \$500,000 general purpose revenue (GPR) to DVA to evaluate post-9/11 veteran needs arising from the increase in multiple deployments, higher survival rates, and longer-term use of skilled nursing.
- Requiring DVA to explore expansion opportunities at all existing sites of the Veterans Housing and Recovery Program.
- Providing funding to DVA to create a master plan for the campus of the State Veterans Home at King to assess the current status of the campus and how the campus can serve veterans.
- Providing funding to the state veterans homes to address their ongoing needs so that each home has adequate resources to provide the best possible care to the most vulnerable veterans in Wisconsin.
- Supporting the continuation of pilot add-ons to address critical recruitment and retention needs at DVA by providing \$6.7 million in non-GPR funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs to support add-ons for several nursing classifications.

Gov. Evers remains committed to meeting Wisconsin veterans where they are and making sure they're aware of the services they're entitled to, whether it's mental health access, preventative programming, family engagement, or education benefits through:

- Doubling the amount of funding to County and Tribal Veterans Services Offices (CVSOs and TVSOs) by providing \$843,600 annually for CVSOs and \$253,000 annually for TVSOs.

CVSOs and TVSOs play a vital role in connecting veterans to needed services.

- Providing \$2.8 million (\$1.2 million in fiscal year 24 and \$1.6 million in fiscal year 25) to enable University of Wisconsin System campuses to provide services tailored to veterans, military personnel, and their families, including achieving the recommended School Certifying Officer (SCO) staffing level of one SCO for every 200 GI Bill-eligible students or otherwise improving or expanding services and supports for veteran and military personnel students.
- Providing \$450,000 GPR in each year as state support for the peer-run respite center for veterans to ensure the center has a reliable, ongoing funding source.
- Providing 7.0 FTE SEG positions and \$957,200 SEG over the biennium to expand the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program, which provides outreach mental health services and support to veterans who may have a mental health condition or substance use disorder. The goal of the program is to reduce the suicide rate among veterans and to provide veterans access to mental health supports, housing, and other services.

Gov. Evers is also investing in further securing the ability of Wisconsin veterans to have access to the services and devices they need post-service by:

- Providing \$250,000 for a grant program to aid Wisconsin dog trainers in attaining Assistance Dog International accreditation, specifically for providing post-traumatic stress disorder training to better serve veterans.
- Expanding access to the Assistance for Needy Veterans Grant program by including medical devices as an allowable expense under the program and increasing the annual and lifetime caps for support under this program.

Veteran Housing and Employment

In his budget proposal, Gov. Evers is encouraging housing and employment stability for veterans and their families through tax credits by:

- Increasing eligibility for the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit by extending eligibility to those with a disability rating of at least 70 percent. This would provide an additional \$43.2 million in tax relief to claimants over the biennium.
- Further expanding eligibility for the Veterans and Surviving Spouses Property Tax Credit by offering the credit to persons who otherwise qualify but rent instead of own their home. This proposal would provide approximately \$10 million in tax relief over the biennium.
- Broadening the current disabled veteran-owned business certification within the Wisconsin Supplier Diversity Program to be a veteran-owned business certification and eliminating the fees associated with participating in the program.
- Providing \$450,000 GPR annually to assist employers that hire veterans who are transitioning to civilian life. The funding will help employers provide training and wrap-around services to veterans.
- Creating a veteran rental assistance program funded at \$1 million GPR in each fiscal year.

Honoring Veterans Past and Present

To honor the final resting places of Wisconsin veterans, Gov. Evers is proposing:

- Funding one new position at each of the Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemeteries to maintain adequate services to those who qualify for internment.
- Investing \$425,000 in FY24 and \$355,000 in FY25 into new equipment to serve the needs of the Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemeteries.
- Providing \$500,000 GPR in each year of the biennium for the University of Wisconsin Missing-in-Action Recovery and Identification Project for missions to recover and identify Wisconsin veterans who went missing during deployment.
- Establishing Veterans Day as a state holiday to commemorate their service. Wisconsin is the only state that does not observe Veterans Day as a state holiday.

- 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 7 – (Introduced February 7, 2023) This bill modifies the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain veterans and their spouses and children enrolled in University of Wisconsin System schools and technical colleges.
- 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 8 – (Introduced February 7, 2023) This bill expands the definition of “veteran” to include individuals who were naturalized pursuant to the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000. The bill extends most veterans benefits to anyone who meets this newly expanded definition of veteran, however, admission to a state veterans home and burial in a veterans cemetery aren't included as they are subject to federal regulation.
- 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 12 -(Introduced February 7, 2023) This bill modifies the residency requirement for the tuition and fee remission program for certain veterans and their spouses and children enrolled in University of Wisconsin System institutions and technical colleges. The bill makes a similar change with respect to grant eligibility for certain veterans and their spouses and children enrolled in private nonprofit colleges. The bill also modifies the UW System nonresident tuition exemption for certain veterans.
- 2023 ASSEMBLY BILL 91 – (Introduced March 8, 2023) This bill creates an application fee exemption for veterans and members of the U.S. Armed forces applying for admission to University of Wisconsin System schools or technical colleges.
- 2023 SENATE BILL 102 – (Introduced March 1, 2023) This bill reduces the eligibility threshold for an eligible veteran, the spouse of an eligible veteran and the unmarried surviving spouse of an eligible veteran to claim the veterans and surviving spouses property tax credit under the individual income tax system. Under the bill, a claimant may claim the credit if the claimant's service-connected disability rating of at least 70 percent. Currently, that rating must be 100 percent.

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VFW Joins Navy Secretary in Ceremony Honoring Hero

The US Navy ship is the first named for a Filipino Medal of Honor recipient

January 10, 2023

GOODS NEWS