



IOWA COUNTY VETERANS NEWSLETTER

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FALL, 2024

PLANS FOR NEW WISCONSIN VETERANS MUSEUM MOVING FORWARD

WEST ALLIS—On August 7th, at the Wisconsin State Fair, the Wisconsin State Building Commission unanimously approved spending \$9 million to purchase the building that currently houses the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. Purchasing the building, located on the Capitol Square, is the next step in the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs plan to construct a new state-of-the-art facility to preserve our state’s veteran history.

“I’m thrilled by the bipartisan support and goodwill shown to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum,” said WDVA Secretary-designee James Bond. “The museum is an exemplary steward of history, collecting and maintaining the artifacts and stories of those who wore the uniform while educating visitors on the importance of service and sacrifice. The new museum will secure our veteran’s legacy for future generations.”

The building that houses the WVM was originally built in 1948 converted from a retail space over 30 years ago. The Museum can only display about 3 percent of its collection, and the building is approaching the end of its useful life. A larger, more modern space will allow more opportunities to tell veteran stories and provide a better space to display and house artifacts.

“I very much appreciate the support of the state building commission today,” said WVM Director Chris Kolakowski. “This is a historic commitment to

Wisconsin veterans and the museum. Thanks to Governor Evers and the members of the Legislature for this bipartisan show of support for Veterans.”

“At the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Foundation, we are excited and very appreciative of the recent action taken by the State Building Commission to approve the purchase of the current Wisconsin Veterans Museum site,” said WVM Foundation President Dan Checki. “We look forward to raising the additional private donations necessary to support the new Museum construction project at 30 West Mifflin Street.”

A DECADE AFTER SCANDAL, VA HEALTH CARE MAY BE AT ANOTHER CROSSROADS

Ten years after a scandal over wait times at [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) medical centers sparked new programs to increase veterans' access to private health care services, a divided Congress is debating the future of VA medical care and how best to fund the department.

The VA has requested \$369.3 billion for its fiscal 2025 budget, including nearly \$150 billion for health care. Within that amount, the VA has allocated \$86 billion for care provided in VA hospitals and clinics and \$41 billion for private network care.

The rise in cost and utilization of the latter, commonly referred to as community care, and the Biden administration's focus on providing care to veterans in VA facilities, have set off debate among lawmakers during this year's budget deliberations over how to fund VA care and where veterans should get their medical treatment.

Democrats largely want to strengthen the VA's own medical infrastructure and staff, which they argue is less expensive and provides better care for veterans, while Republicans want the VA to focus on providing quality care while also allowing veterans to choose who they want to see, including outside the VA.

VA officials have warned that the department's community care budget is growing unsustainably, and they favor improving VA programs and services and ensuring that veterans get care in VA hospitals and clinics.

"Right now, we're at a critical moment for shaping and securing the future of veteran health care in America, so we will work reliably to offer a VA care option to every veteran, even vets who qualify for community care admission," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in a hearing before the House Veterans Affairs Committee. "We want to bring as many vets as possible into our care, because study after study shows that vets do better at VA."

A scandal erupted throughout the VA in the spring of 2014 after allegations surfaced that as many as 40 veterans died while waiting for treatment at the VA Phoenix Health Care System.

A 2014 VA inspector general's report found that Phoenix medical center staff manipulated wait-lists to meet department standards, delaying appointments for veterans, and the wait time issues were not confined to Phoenix: The VA inspector general found that appointment scheduling subsequently was a nationwide problem, with issues found at 77 other VA facilities.

To increase access to care, Congress passed the Choice Act in 2014 which consolidated the VA's community care programs and allowed veterans who spent hours on the road going to appointments to receive community care.

The access standards were expanded under the Mission Act in 2018, to include those who faced more than a 30-minute drive for primary care or mental health services or 60 minutes for specialty care. The law also allowed veterans who faced more than a 20-day wait for a primary care or mental health appointment and more than 28 days for specialty care to get private care.

The introduction of the [PACT Act](#), which broadened health care and benefits for millions of combat veterans, expanded the number of veterans eligible for VA care. In the past year, the department has enrolled more than 401,000 veterans, 30% more than the previous year.

To handle the influx and increase demand for services, the VA has requested a budget increase of nearly 13% for fiscal 2025. But those increases are largely for mandatory spending, while the \$134 billion in discretionary spending represents one-tenth of a percentage point lower than the 2024 amount.

Operating within budget constraints, the VA has backed off a hiring spree it initiated last year within the Veterans Health Administration, and proposed in its budget to cover nearly half of community care costs by using alternative funding sources such as the Toxic Exposures Fund and medical debt collections.

The strategy leaves lawmakers on both sides of the aisle concerned about benefits and services for veterans.

California Rep. Mark Takano, the ranking Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the VA's health care budget is "out of balance."

"Rather than directing billions of dollars to the community, we must provide VA with the necessary resources and staffing to ensure that direct care is robust, modern and meeting veterans where they are," Takano said.

On the other side of the dais, Rep. Matt Rosendale, R-Mont., said Congress' job is to ensure that veterans get needed health care and services regardless of delivery.

"What our job here is, is to make sure that veterans get the care that they have earned, that they deserve, when they want it, where they want it -- not to protect the VA," Rosendale said.

In the hearing, McDonough warned against any congressional moves that would take money away from funding VA-provided health services and staff and could, essentially, lead VA to functioning as a medical insurance entity, managing payments for community care.

"Let me just underscore, again, my appreciation for this committee's support, and the entire Congress' support, on a bipartisan basis for historic investments in VA, including throughout the pandemic," McDonough said. "Those investments mean that the unit cost per care over time -- because of the investment in infrastructure to date -- makes VA a longer-term, better outcomes-based investment for the taxpayers."

The majority of veterans service organizations support the VA's efforts to invest in its own staff, infrastructure and patients. In [their annual Independent Budget](#), Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars said that the VA's proposed 2025 budget "raises concerns" over the reduction of health care personnel and what they described as the "continued over-reliance on community care rather than investing in VA's internal capacity."

VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION HAPPENINGS

The Village of Ridgeway, with assistance from American Legion Post #257 is putting together a veteran's memorial. On 7 September, 2024 from 11 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. they are hosting a "Veterans Cruise In", all vehicles welcome, prior to the Battle of the Bats baseball game. There will be live music, 50/50 raffles and a silent auction. All proceeds will go to the veteran's memorial. The car show will end with a color guard ceremony at 2:30 p.m. The Village of Ridgeway is also selling commemorative bricks for the memorial. If you have any questions about the event or the memorial contact the Village Office at (608)924-5881

CPL ROBERT PAUL RAESS - SERVICE MEMBER PROFILE

On March 26, 2024, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) identified the remains of Corporal Robert Paul Raess, missing from the Korean War.

Corporal Raess entered the U.S. Army from Wisconsin and served in the recoilless rifle squad of C Company, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. On August 31, CPL Raess's 1st Battalion was positioned on high ground above

the Naktong River, reinforcing the front lines of American and Republic of Korea forces defending Pusan Harbor, South Korea. The battalion's position was overrun when the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) launched an offensive against the gathered forces. After the NKPA overran their position during the offensive, the men of the recoilless rifle squad made their way off the company's position and down a trail that led to lake U-Po, where they hoped to meet up with other withdrawing American units. However, as they moved along the base of a small hill, NKPA soldiers atop the hill fired on them, and CPL Raess and two other men were hit and fell into a ditch near the trail. Two survivors later reported that the NKPA troops then overran the squad, captured prisoners, and bayoneted the men in the ditch, including CPL Raess. During post-war search and recovery efforts one set of remains was recovered from the south of Lake U-Po, however they could not be identified at the time and were buried as Unknowns at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. CPL Raess' remains were not among those identified during these efforts. On April 19, 2021, this set of Unknown remains were disinterred and sent to the DPAA laboratory for further study. The laboratory analysis and the totality of the circumstantial evidence available established an association between one set of these unknown remains and CPL Raess.

Corporal Raess is memorialized on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. His name is also inscribed on the Korean War Veterans Memorial Wall in Washington, DC, which was updated in 2022 to include the names of the fallen. Corporal Raess' remains are scheduled to return in early September, 2024. Service information is available on the Gorgen Funeral Home website.

2024 HEALTH and WELLNESS EXPO

The Health and Wellness Expo will be on 13 September from 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at the Hidden Valley Community Church, 605 N Bennett Rd., Dodgeville. Participants will be able to meet with several vendors and service providers from the area. There will be door prizes, a drop-off for disposal of old medications and health screenings. All items are first come first served, while supplies last.

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**Veterans
Newsletter**

NOTABLE DATES

September 2nd – Labor Day

November 3rd – Daylight Saving Time ends

November 28th – Thanksgiving Day

October 31st – Halloween

November 11th – Veterans Day

Veterans Service Officer Training Conference

(CVSO available via e-mail or telephone only)

October 14-17, 2024

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE CLOSINGS IN 2024

Labor Day

Thanksgiving Holiday

Christmas Holiday

Monday, September 2nd

Thursday/Friday, November 28th & 29th

Tuesday/Wednesday, December 24th & 25th