



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

Joint Opinion Column
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Authored By:

Rep. Ken Skowronski
Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs - Chair
(608) 266-8590

Rep. Nancy VanderMeer
Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs – Vice Chair
(608) 266-8366

A Great Budget For Veterans:
Legislature's Budget Makes Largest Commitment to Veterans Trust Fund Ever

Sometimes those that have served our country and our state are not at the forefront of people's minds. Unless an individual has served or has a relative that has served, or even works with or is friends with a veteran, they might not be aware of some of the attention and care that needs to be put toward making sure that our veterans are at the forefront of people's minds when they return home to our local communities. Objectively, we're fortunate in Wisconsin to provide some of the best veteran's benefits in the nation and we consistently score high in national rankings for taking care of those who've served, but there's always more work to be done. With that in mind, as the Chair and Vice Chairperson of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, we are very pleased to share that the 2019-2021 biennial state budget that the legislature's Joint Committee on Finance put together this session is a great budget for our state's veterans.

For those not familiar, the Veterans Trust Fund is a fund that supports programs benefitting Wisconsin veterans and their families, promoting the interests of veterans. Most benefit programs administered by the state Department of Veterans Affairs are funded from the Veterans Trust Fund and therefore the fund is the largest fiscal item that the state deals with related to our state's veterans. The fund receives revenues from various sources, including repayments of loans the Department of Veterans Affairs has made under their personal loan program, federal grants, and receipts from sales at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. However, the fund, which had revenues of \$12.8 million and expenditures totaling \$13.6 million in fiscal year 2017-2018, has suffered declining revenues in recent years for various reasons, including a



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decrease in program revenue from residents at state veteran's homes. More state general purpose revenues have been needed to meet the needs of our veterans, and this budget delivers on that.

To address this ongoing issue, under the legislature's budget, an ongoing appropriation is created utilizing general purpose revenue beginning in fiscal year 2019-2020, a year earlier than the Governor proposed. This results the largest commitment ever in state dollars to the Veterans Trust Fund and an increase in funding over what the Governor proposed by \$13,800,000. Authorizing these funds right away will make a meaningful difference.

In addition, related to the 2019-2021 Capital Budget and the State Building Program, administered by the Department of Administration and the State Building Commission, the legislature's budget allocates over \$18 million of state and federal funds to build, improve, and maintain state veteran's facilities across the state. The Union Grove Veterans Home in Racine County, the King Veterans Home in Waupaca County, and the Northern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spooner are all included. This allocation matches what the Governor proposed.

Again, we are very pleased with what the legislature put together for our state's veterans and believe that it meets our obligation to those in our state that have sacrificed for our nation and our state. The legislature matched the Governor's recommendations in some areas and increased funding in others. We were happy to vote for and support this session's biennial budget for this, and a number of other reasons and we encourage Governor Evers to keep the veteran's provisions in this session's biennial budget. We look forward to continuing to work with veterans and stakeholders across the state to make sure we're taking care of those that sacrificed so much to protect the freedom and independence paramount to our way of life.

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Ken Skowronski represents the 82nd Wisconsin State Assembly District, located within Milwaukee County, including the communities of Greendale, Franklin, and Greenfield, and currently serves as the Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs.

Nancy VanderMeer represents the 70th Wisconsin State Assembly District, which includes portions of Monroe, Jackson, Portage and Wood counties, and currently serves as the Vice Chairperson of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs.