



**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF  
JOSEPH R. CHENELLY  
AMVETS (AMERICAN VETERANS)  
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
TO THE  
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
JUNE 14, 2017**

Mr. Chairman Isakson, Ranking Member Tester and Members of the Committee:

As the largest veterans service organization open to all veterans who served honorably, regardless of when or where they served, it is a pleasure to present our views on the fiscal year 2018 budget for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

On behalf of AMVETS National Commander Harold Chapman, we are proud to fully support the requests for funding as outlined in *The Independent Budget* (IB). It is crucial that the VA Secretary has all the resources needed to successfully, efficiently and responsibly run the many facets of the Department.

One area of great concern that AMVETS wants addressed immediately is the White House's proposed cut to Individual Unemployability (IU) compensation for veterans eligible for Social Security.

AMVETS National Headquarters has received thousands of emails, calls and messages over the past two weeks from veterans decrying the proposal to steal 225,000 Social Security eligible aged veterans the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' IU compensation program if they have paid into Social Security at any point during their life.

Individual Unemployability is a VA program for veterans who cannot work because of their service-connected disabilities. These veterans are rated below 100 percent per the VA rating schedule. But each recipient of IU has been through an exhaustive verification process to ensure they are unable to earn wages above federal poverty guidelines because of their wounds, injuries or illness.

Cutting this earned and needed benefit would "save" \$3.2 billion in 2018 and \$41 billion over the next decade, which is slated to go toward an expanded VA Choice program, which has yet to be fully developed. We feel if President Trump knew of the serious repercussions, he would have not included this in his budget request.

These veterans earned a lifetime disability benefit for their service to this nation. They did not ask to become disabled or to become unemployable as a result of their injuries or wounds. Our nation owes it to them to keep its promise, so they may continue to make ends meet.

If veterans lose their IU, it would trigger the loss of:

- Civilian Health & Medical Program of the VA (CHAMPVA)
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
- Chapter 35 Educational Benefits for the family
- Commissary privileges
- Property tax relief
- VA Dental & Vision Care
- Vehicle exemption fees

We firmly believe that if this measure of the budget passes, that it would put the lives of these veterans at serious risk. VA's most recent report on suicide notes that about 65% of all veterans who died from suicide were aged 50 years or older.

We urge your committee to reject this dangerous part of the President's budget and not include any cuts to IU in your budget. Every day those who would be affected are growing more distressed. They deserve to keep this earned benefit and live their senior years with some peace of mind knowing that the country they served is not deserting them in the time of their greatest need.

AMVETS is grateful for the Committee's hard work to provide oversight and the resources necessary for our federal government to keep its promises to veterans, their families and survivors. Any questions or need for additional information may be addressed to AMVETS National Legislative Adviser Ms. Amy Webb at (301) 683-4015 or [awebb@amvets.org](mailto:awebb@amvets.org).