



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #973

Management Travel Increases (Veterans Affairs -- General Agency Provisions)

[LFB 2001-03 Budget Summary: Page 699, #12]

CURRENT LAW

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has a general program operations appropriation for the administration of programs funded from the Veterans Trust Fund and a similar general program operations appropriation for the administration of veterans loan programs. These two appropriations have combined base level supplies and services funding of \$1,328,400 SEG annually.

GOVERNOR

Provide total additional funding of \$25,000 SEG annually under these two general program operations appropriations to support increased travel expenses for the Department's senior management and other staff.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The Department has identified a combined total of \$50,100 SEG annually of base level funding budgeted under these two general program operations appropriations to support central office management travel during the current fiscal year.
2. The agency has offered the following rationales for the need for additional senior management travel funding above current funding levels:
 - The new funding would allow increased attendance at such venues as town meetings

with veterans; conferences and conventions of the various national veterans organizations; and before Congressional committees for the purpose of offering testimony on new programs or seeking additional funding for the state.

- There are a variety of critical programs that significantly affect state veterans that agency management believes can best be influenced to the benefit of Wisconsin's veterans through face-to-face meetings with the appropriate federal officials.

- The Department has made it a high priority to secure additional federal funding allocations to Wisconsin. During the 1999-00 fiscal year, DVA indicates that its direct involvement with federal officials led to over \$11 million in additional federal grants and payments; consequently, the "additional funding for travel is needed if the Department is to continue its success in obtaining federal grant dollars."

3. The agency has not provided any additional detail on how the need for \$25,000 SEG annually was actually determined. However, an examination of the agency's total in-state and out-of-state travel costs charged during 1999-00 to the two administrative appropriations cited above determined that the agency expended a total of \$34,100 SEG for all in-state travel and conferences and for all out-of-state travel and conferences. During the current fiscal year, the agency has expended \$31,100 SEG for these same purposes through April, 2001. Based on these expenditures to date, total travel expenditures for all of the 2000-01 fiscal year are projected at \$37,300 SEG.

4. Inasmuch as the Department has identified base level travel funding of \$50,100 SEG annually of base level funding for travel, it would appear that the agency has sufficient available base level resources, given its current level of travel expenditures, to support additional travel without the need for further resources. Arguably, within the agency's total supplies and services base for these two appropriations [\$1,328,400 SEG annually], additional discretionary funding could likely be identified to fund additional travel expenses, if needed.

5. Further, it could be argued that during periods of budgetary constraints, all agencies, regardless of funding source, should exercise restraint on discretionary spending items, such as travel. Agencies always have the option of coordinating out-of-state travel events to minimize the number of separate out-of-state trips that must be made, utilizing teleconferencing and interactive Internet capabilities, and securing the assistance and intervention of the state's Congressional delegation. To the extent that additional travel is indicated, priority should be given to activities designed to maximize the flow of federal funds for veterans to the state with correspondingly less emphasis on town meetings with veterans or conferences and conventions of the various national veterans organizations.

6. If the Committee concludes that these considerations have merit, it could delete the \$25,000 SEG annually recommended for additional senior management staff travel expenses.

7. Alternatively, the Committee could conclude that the benefits of increasing the ability of the Department's senior management to engage in additional travel to Washington to monitor and participate in the development of federal veterans policy and work for the allocation of

additional federal veterans funding to the state would far outweigh the additional \$25,000 SEG annually being requested by the agency. If the Committee believes that this argument has merit, it could approve the additional travel funding, as recommended by the Governor.

ALTERNATIVES TO BILL

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation
2. Delete the Governor's recommendation.

Alternative 2	SEG
2001-03 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	- \$50,000

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