



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

Full Committee Markup of FY 2015 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill April 9, 2014 *Statement As Prepared*

Our first order of business this morning is the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill for fiscal year 2015.

I am pleased to recognize the distinguished Subcommittee Chairman, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Culberson, to present the first bill of the year to the Full Committee.

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I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Bishop.

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Thank you both for your remarks, and for your care in drafting this very important bill. Your attentive work and shared support for our troops and our veterans have resulted in a bill that I am proud to back today.

One of our most important duties as Members of Congress is to provide for the protection of this nation and to ensure that those who serve in our armed forces have the care and quality of life they deserve.

For as long as I can remember, the MilCon/VA bill has been a true representation of successful, bipartisan collaboration that truly benefits our nation, our vets, and our troops.

This year's bill is no different. As Chairman Culberson said, this bill funds important Department of Defense infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and family housing, to ensure a good quality of life for our service men and women, and to provide them the resources they need.

But it also guarantees that once these men and women transition out of active duty, this nation will continue to care for them. This includes providing quality medical care, job training and education, and other benefits.

Notably, I'm glad that this bill continues this Committee's hard work in recent years to remedy the greatest problems facing the Department of Veterans Affairs – the offensive disability claims backlog, and the need for an interoperable, DOD/VA electronic health record system.

To help our veterans get the benefits they deserve in a timely fashion, this bill provides additional funding above FY14 levels for claims processing, and continues oversight requirements that track progress in reducing the backlog.

And we continue funding for the modernization of the VA electronic health records system to ensure it works seamlessly, is implemented as soon as possible, and will work well for our veterans.

In total, discretionary funding for programs that benefit our nation's veterans is increased by \$1.5 billion over last year. I believe this will go a long way to preserving the peace of mind and livelihoods of those who have sacrificed such a great deal for our nation.

With that said, the *total* amount of discretionary funding provided in this bill is \$1.8 billion *less* than last year. That is a testament to the Subcommittee's ability to make careful, specific decisions to trim unnecessary funds and to find ways to be more efficient with taxpayer dollars. This includes reductions to military construction accounts due to current price stability and a favorable bid climate.

The final product is a bill that is both fiscally responsible, and responsible to our commitments to our service-members and veterans.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill today. Thank you.

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