



Chairman John Culberson
*Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans
Affairs, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

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

Thank you, Chairman Rogers for your unswerving commitment to our veterans – and for giving me the opportunity to work on this bill. It is an honor to Chair the Subcommittee that provides for the peace of mind and quality of life for our military - and that ensures that our veterans receive the benefits that they have earned as a result of the sacrifices that they have made for our freedom.

It has been a great pleasure to work with our Ranking Members, Ms. Lowey and Mr. Bishop on this important legislation.

I also want to thank all of the Members of the Subcommittee. I know that we have been moving quickly since the budget was released and I appreciate your hard work and responsiveness during these busy weeks.

I believe this bill reflects our longstanding tradition of bipartisan support of our military, our veterans, and their families.

It includes \$71.5 billion in discretionary funding, which is \$1.8 billion less than fiscal year 2014 and \$398 million less than the budget request.

The bill provides the full budget request of \$6.6 billion for military construction projects. Although this is \$3.3 billion less than last year, we realize that the Department of Defense needs to complete the European Infrastructure Consolidation Study and assess force structure before requesting the construction projects that will be needed for the future.

The bill also includes \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs which is \$1.5 billion more than fiscal year 2014. This includes \$20 million more than was requested to get at the claims backlog and \$17 million more than was requested for the electronic health record.

But our responsibility to our veterans does not end at funding - we must ensure that the funds that are provided are used wisely. More must be done to eliminate the claims backlog - and while we have provided additional funding to speed the electronic health record program – it simply must be interoperable with the DOD health record. I know that Mr. Bishop - and all the

Subcommittee Members' are concerned about these issues. Therefore language is included to: continue reporting requirements on the claims backlog; restrict the use of the 75 percent of the electronic health funds until the VA takes the next steps to assure that this record will be interoperable with DOD; and limit the availability of construction funds to five years so that veterans do not wait endlessly for the completion of a hospital.

With this bill, we have once again been able to protect the high-quality support and services provided to our military, our veterans, and their families. I urge you to support it.

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