



Chairman Charlie Dent

*Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs
House Committee on Appropriations*

**Full Committee Markup – FY 2016 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,
and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill
April 22, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, for the support and keen attention you bring to this bill, as we provide for our servicemembers, our veterans, and our monuments and cemeteries. This is the first bill I am bringing to the Committee as a Subcommittee Chairman, and it is a privilege to do so. It's also a responsibility which I take to heart.

I greatly appreciate the participation of our Subcommittee members, both sides of the aisle, as we considered priorities and funding levels for the important programs in our bill. Our Subcommittee Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop, has been tremendous, as has the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Mrs. Lowey.

I believe this bill reflects our longstanding tradition of bipartisan support of our military, our veterans, and their families. Our investment of nearly \$77 billion for Military Construction and VA, 6 percent over last year's level, is unprecedented.

This bill provides comprehensive support for servicemembers, military families, and veterans.

The legislation provides a total of \$7.6 billion for military construction projects and family housing, including base and Overseas Contingency Operations funding – an increase of \$904 million above the enacted fiscal year 2015 level, and \$755 million below the President's request .

This bill supports our troops with the facilities and services necessary to maintain readiness and morale at bases here in the states and around the world, and provides for Defense Department schools and health clinics that take care of military families.

The bill funds our veteran healthcare systems and disability claims operations to ensure that our promise to care for those who have sacrificed in defense of this great nation continues as those men and women return home.

Discretionary funding for Veterans programs in the bill is \$68.7 billion. Total fiscal year 2016 discretionary funding is \$3.6 billion above fiscal year 2015 and \$1.4 billion below the budget request. \$3.0 billion of this increase was advance funded.

The bill funds VA medical services at \$48.6 billion. That includes a \$970 million increase over the advanced funding from last year.

We provide the full request for the Veterans Benefits Administration, which is a \$163 million increase over fiscal year 2015, and the full request for the Board of Veterans appeals.

The bill contains \$233 million for the modernization of the VA electronic health record. The bill includes language restricting funding until the VA demonstrates progress on the system's functionality and interoperability.

Major construction within the VA is funded at \$562 million, which is the same level as fiscal year 2015. The bill provides funding for hospital replacement and allows the VA to continue to correct seismic safety issues and deficiencies. We did not fund the full \$1.1 billion budget request for construction as we face the impact of gross mismanagement of the Colorado VA Hospital Construction, which resulted in a \$930 million cost overrun.

Overall in the bill, we have tightened oversight mechanisms and there are some items not funded at the request. As I noted at Subcommittee markup: Not every idea has merit—not every project is mission critical. We included reasonable cuts and rescissions, as part of our responsibility as appropriators.

That being said—this is a very solid, \$77 billion, bipartisan bill that is focused on the needs of our military and veterans. It is a bill we can all be proud of. Support for this bill is a vote of support for our service members, our military families, and the over 48 million individuals served by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I urge you to support the bill. I yield back.

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