



Chairman Hal Rogers

House Committee on Appropriations

**Full Committee Markup – FY 2017 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related
Agencies Appropriations Bill
April 13, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Good morning, and welcome to our first Full Committee markup of the Fiscal Year 2017 Appropriations process.

Once again, we are off to a speedy beginning – kicking off what I hope will be a productive year. It's also a busy start – in addition to today's full committee markup of the Military Construction – Veterans Affairs bill and a 302(b) report, we also have both the Energy and Water and the Agriculture bills in subcommittee this afternoon. I hope that we can be brief and complete our business this morning in an efficient manner.

First, I want to thank you all for your hard work over the past several months.

We have been operating under a very tight schedule, but our subcommittees still held nearly 100 hearings – ensuring our oversight over federal spending remains as thorough as ever. These hearings are a critical part of the process – helping us draft good bills like the one we have before us today. I appreciate your commitment and scheduling sacrifices, particularly on days when it seemed you had to be in three places at once.

Your dedication to getting the job done well is one of the things that makes this Committee so great. You respect the process and each other – working across the aisle and across the country. I hope we'll continue our long-held tradition of collegiality today and at all of our markups this year.

We are all working toward the same end – finishing all 12 appropriations bills on time and under regular order. I want to thank the Full Committee Ranking Member Mrs. Lowey for her partnership and her shared commitment toward this goal.

One housekeeping item – it's time once again to replenish our Committee "Flower Fund." For those of you who may have forgotten, this fund is used to send flowers or food baskets to the family of a Member who has experienced an illness, lost a family member, or is celebrating other significant life events. Mr. Jenkins on the Republican side, and Mr. Kilmer on the Democrat side are co-chairs of this fund. Please take a moment to provide these gentlemen with a \$20 donation today so that we can keep this committee tradition going.

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Thank you for your comments and for your hard work getting this bill out of the gate.

This bill is balanced and bipartisan – providing important support for our troops, their families, and our veterans. It is our responsibility to provide well-funded infrastructure, solid quality-of-life programs, and fair benefits for the brave men and women who have put their lives on the line in defense of this nation.

As Chairman Dent noted, this legislation provides \$81.6 billion in discretionary funding for Department of Defense infrastructure and the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is \$1.8 billion above last year's levels.

Funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs has been increased by three percent over last year's enacted level, totaling \$73.5 billion. For their sacrifices, our veterans deserve full access to their promised benefits – to receive timely, high-quality medical care and well-deserved educational opportunities and job transition services, among other important programs.

Notably, this includes \$850 million to address arising health care needs – the treatment of hepatitis C, long-term care, support services for caregivers, and addressing homelessness. In total, this bill ensures that 7 million patients can be treated by the the VA health system in fiscal year 2017.

However, too often we hear reports of the VA missing the mark on its mission. This funding, and other oversight provisions included in this bill, will help address persistent, pervasive problems that have plagued the VA – the disability claims backlog, construction mismanagement, and the completion of an interoperable electronic health records system for the Department of Defense and VA.

To address the claims backlog and speed up the appeals process, the bill provides \$2.8 billion, and continues rigorous reporting requirements to track each office on its performance.

For the modernization of the VA electronic health record, \$260 million is included in the bill.

This funding, coupled with important benchmarks to guarantee progress, will make sure that our veterans receive seamless health care as they transition from active duty. It is high time that the VA and Department of Defense have an entirely interoperable electronic record system, and it is this Committee's goal to see that through to fruition.

The bill also tightens oversight over VA construction projects – keeping the VA accountable to the taxpayer as it takes on large-scale projects.

Lastly, I'm particularly pleased the Committee is working with the VA to address the growing issue of pain prescription mismanagement.

Opioid abuse has become a tragic scourge on this nation, and I am proud that this bill provides important resources to help ensure that our veterans receive responsible pain management care that follows proper protocols.

I am also pleased that this bill helps to take care of our servicemen and women during their active duty – making sure that they have access to quality housing, medical and education facilities, and other important infrastructure needed both in the United States and abroad.

Again, I want to thank Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Bishop, and the subcommittee for their work on this bill.

This is a good piece of legislation that is most importantly responsible – responsible to our troops, responsible to our commitments to our veterans, and responsible to the taxpayers. I urge my colleagues to support it today.

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Statement on Report on the Interim Suballocation of Budget Allocations – As Prepared

Our second and final order of business today is consideration of the interim 302(b) allocation for the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

Although the House has yet to approve budget resolution for fiscal year 2017, this report follows the intent of section 302(b) of the Congressional Budget Act, and will help facilitate floor action on the Mil Con – VA bill, whenever it is scheduled.

It is my sincere hope that we will soon have an approved budget resolution that will provide us with our topline number for the 2017 fiscal year.

But absent that, this Committee intends to move forward and fulfill its constitutional responsibilities using the topline number that has already been agreed to by the Congress and the White House and has been signed into law.

For now, I urge you to support this interim 302(b) allocation for this important bill – to allow us to provide for our troops and veterans, and proceed with our Appropriations work at this point in time.

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