



# Chairman Charlie Dent

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

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**FY 2018 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill  
Full Committee Markup  
June 15, 2017  
Opening Statement As Prepared**

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Thank you, Chairman Frelinghuysen, for the opportunity to bring this bill before the full Committee this afternoon—the first appropriations bill of the year.

Before we move into the consideration of this bill, I think we all need to take a moment to reflect on the bigger picture of the environment that we find ourselves in as a result of the tragic events that transpired yesterday morning. While I know that Whip Scalise would like us to keep moving forward on the important work before us, I would ask that we all continue to keep him and all of the other victims of yesterday's senseless attack in our thoughts and prayers. We are grateful to have Chuck Fleischmann safe with us in Full Committee today.

The Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies bill provides generously for our servicemembers, our veterans, their families, and our monuments and cemeteries. Chairman Frelinghuysen and Mrs. Lowey have provided strong support for this bill; in particular, both of them have been focused on oversight of on the Electronic Health Record for nearly ten years. Finally VA has announced that there is going to be one, single record for active duty and veterans.

I appreciate the full committee Chairman and Ranking Member's leadership and the participation of all the members of the subcommittee, including our new Ranking Member, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who brings a lot of energy and dedication to the role.

We have remained engaged in a very active and transparent process as we assembled this year's bill, and this bill incorporates the feedback of over 1,000 Member requests from both sides of the aisle.

Now, for the numbers. The bill contains \$88.8 billion in budget authority, an increase of \$6 billion over last year's level.

The funding recommendation includes:

- \$10.2 billion for Military Construction, which is a \$2.1 billion increase over the fiscal year 2017 level, or 25 percent. This funding recommendation strongly reinforces the priorities in the President's budget request. The bill includes \$9.6 billion in base funding

and \$638 million in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding. The level is \$198 million under the request.

- \$78.6 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is an increase of nearly \$4 billion over the FY 17 level and \$384 million under the budget request. Of the \$78.6 billion provided for VA, \$69 billion is for medical care for 7 million veterans. We make important investments in many VA programs, including mental health treatment and suicide prevention, research, and claims processing, at or above the budget request.
- And \$252 million is for the Related Agencies in our bill, \$8 million above the requested level--the American Battle Monuments Commission, Arlington National Cemetery, the Armed Forces Retirement Home, and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. The increase of \$8 million over the president's budget is to support security requirements at Arlington Cemetery.

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. It is extremely important that we get our infrastructure in shape to support the force we have now as well as the force we want to grow in the future.

And the bill funds our veteran healthcare systems 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. We owe this to our vets and are committed to sustained oversight so that programs deliver what they promise, and taxpayers are well served by the investments we make.

I urge you to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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