



# **Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen**

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## *House Committee on Appropriations*

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

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Good afternoon and welcome to our first full committee markup of the FY 2018 Appropriations cycle.

Unfortunately, we meet today under somber circumstances. We offer our thoughts and prayers to all those affected, and we hope for a swift recovery to Congressman Scalise, Zack Barth, Matt Mika, Special Agent David Bailey, Special Agent Crystal Griner, and those injured.

We also commend the heroic acts of the U.S. Capitol Police, who put their lives on the line time after time to protect us, our staffs, and the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the Capitol each year. Because of their bravery and quick thinking, many lives were saved yesterday. Our gratitude goes out to not only the officers injured, but the entire Capitol Police force.

Congressman Scalise, along with his security, and many other Members of Congress and staff – including one of our own, Congressman Fleischmann – were gathered yesterday to practice for the Congressional Baseball Game - an annual charity event designed to bring Democrats and Republicans together in celebration of the spirit of bipartisanship.

We can honor them today by embodying this spirit as we begin our full committee work for FY 2018.

I want to thank you all for your hard work over the past several months. We've held more than 60 hearings over the past two and a half months to ensure that this committee maintains its essential oversight duties, even within a compact schedule. These hearings help us draft fiscally sound bills like the one we are marking up today. After all, the "power of the purse" sits with the Congress – and it is our job to make these important spending decisions on behalf of the people we represent.

We will continue this critical work, holding several more budget hearings over the next several weeks, and putting forth appropriations bills that adequately and responsibly fund our federal government.

We will move quickly through this process under an especially tight schedule. I appreciate your willingness to be flexible and your accommodation as we plow ahead.

The White House has given us an initial blueprint. There are many items in the proposal that my Republican colleagues and I agree with, and those priorities – and those of our caucus – will be reflected in our bills this year. And, of course, there are some that we will not agree with.

We have been given a mandate by the American people to change business as usual in Washington, to rein in waste and abuse, and to invest in programs that are critically important, such as those included in this national security bill before us today.

Now to the business at hand.

Today, we meet to consider the Fiscal Year 2018 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill, as well as the interim 302(b) suballocation for this bill that will enable it to continue through the process.

I would now like to recognize the Full Committee Ranking Member, Mrs. Lowey, for her opening remarks, but before I do, I would like to thank her for her ongoing partnership and for her fierce support of this committee and our work. Mrs. Lowey, the floor is yours.

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We are coming out of the gate with a very important bill - the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

This is a solid bill that reflects our chief priority as Members of Congress: to provide for our national defense.

The foundation of a strong national defense is a well-supported military force, who serve our country with the guarantee that they will be cared for when they retire from active duty or become disabled defending our nation.

The funding provided in this legislation – totaling \$88.8 billion in discretionary funding – will continue the rebuilding of our national security – ensuring our troops have the resources they need to conduct successful missions and to keep our nation secure.

As Chairman Dent highlighted, the bill provides \$10.2 billion for construction and maintenance of the facilities and resources that will support our troops and their missions at home and abroad.

This funding – a 25 percent increase over current levels – reflects the goal of the White House and our caucus to support and sustain programs that ensure our troops are ready for the fight – which is absolutely imperative as we rebuild and grow our military force.

It targets funding to critical construction projects, and supports the quality of life for our troops – so they can rest assured that they and their families are being taken care of throughout their service.

For the Department of Veterans Affairs, the bill includes \$78.3 billion, ensuring our veterans – who have sacrificed so much in the name of the United States – receive the services and benefits they have earned.

This total includes a nearly 7 percent increase in funding for medical care at the VA. These funds will be used to treat the mind and body of our veterans – including mental health care services, suicide prevention, traumatic brain injury treatment, opioid abuse prevention, and assistance for homeless veterans.

With the welcome news that the VA is embarking on a new effort for a joint health records-keeping system with the Department of Defense, I am pleased that the bill addresses ongoing issues related to its implementation and encourages a responsible, cost-effective transition. This Committee looks forward to working with Secretary Shulkin to keep a close eye on this process.

This legislation also addresses other issues plaguing the VA - including the benefit appeals backlog. As the number of claims increases and grows more complex, it is critical that we provide adequate funding to help reduce this backlog, and to track progress on this issue.

I am proud this bill makes investments that address these and other challenges at the VA – like closing service loopholes, improving efficiency through technology, and implementing thorough oversight to ensure that every dollar spent at the VA goes directly to the improved care of our veterans.

I would like to thank Chairman Dent and Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, their subcommittee members, and the professional staff for their commitment to all the brave men and women who wear or have worn our nation's uniform.

I'm proud to begin the FY 2018 Appropriations process with this bill – a bill that fulfills our obligations to our troops and our veterans, and our obligation to be responsible and judicious with taxpayer dollars. I urge my colleagues to support it today.

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## *House Committee on Appropriations*

**Interim Suballocation of Budget Allocations for Fiscal Year 2018  
Full Committee Markup  
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Opening Statement As Prepared**

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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 a budget resolution for fiscal year 2018, this report follows the intent of section 302(b) of the Congressional Budget act, and helps facilitate floor action of this bill, whenever that may be.

I am optimistic that we will soon have an approved budget resolution that will provide us with our topline number for the 2018 fiscal year.

In the meantime, this Committee will continue to move forward and fulfill our constitutional responsibility.

I urge you to support the interim suballocation for this critical bill that supports our national security, our troops, and our veterans.

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