



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen
Subcommittee on Defense
House Committee on Appropriations

Fiscal Year 2015 Defense Health Program Budget Hearing
April 2, 2014
Opening Statement As Prepared

The Subcommittee will come to order.

This morning, the subcommittee holds an open hearing on the fiscal year 2015 budget request for the Defense Health Program.

I would like to welcome: Dr. Jonathan Woodson, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs; the Surgeon General of the Army, Lieutenant General Patricia Horoho; the Surgeon General of the Navy, Vice Admiral Matthew Nathan; and the Surgeon General of the Air Force, Lieutenant General Thomas Travis. I thank all of you for your service and welcome you back to the Committee.

As always, this Committee remains committed to providing the very best in medical care to our servicemen and women – all volunteers – as they who put their lives on the line for us each and every day.

Whether at home or abroad, they deserve the best physicians, nurses, health professionals, equipment and technology available to treat whatever wounds they sustain – physical *or* mental.

For example, more than 15-hundred personnel now bear amputations. I have seen estimates that I have read estimates of up to 400,000 individuals suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Many of you saw the front-page *Washington Post* story on Sunday, “A Legacy of Pain and Pride.” The piece reports that more than half of the 2.6 million personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan struggle with physical or mental health problems stemming from their service, feel disconnected from civilian life and believe the government is failing to meet their needs of this generation’s veterans.

Retired Army Staff Sergeant Christopher Steavens crystalized the mission that this Committee and the Department of Defense has before us. He said: “I raised my right hand and said, ‘I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. I gave them everything I could, I expect the same in return.’” And he should expect the same in return.

I recognize that the VA bears responsibility here, but as far as active, guard and reserve personnel are concerned, your Department and this Committee must recommit ourselves to giving soldiers, sailors, Marine and airmen “everything” they need.

We are keenly aware that the Department of Defense faces a tremendous challenge with the growing cost and long term sustainability of the Military Health System – a system with 9.6 million beneficiaries.

Military health care costs have risen from \$19 billion in fiscal year 2001 to approximately \$47.4 billion in the fiscal year 2015 budget request. This budget request assumes savings associated with several controversial TRICARE benefit cost-sharing proposals. I would note that these recommendations must ultimately be approved by Congress and they have been rejected in the past. The Committee is interested in hearing more about these proposals today.

Additionally, the Committee remains distressed about the unacceptably high rate of suicide and sexual assault and the ability of the Department to provide mental health counseling for service members. It is imperative for the Department to get to the heart of these two important issues.

The Committee is anxious to hear about what progress the Department has made in these areas and what we can do to assist in the coming fiscal year.

We also remain very concerned – after years of substantial investment - over the continued lack of an electronic health record that will help service members seamlessly transition their care from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

This is an issue with “real world” day-to-day implications for our troops and our veterans!

The initial mandate for an integrated record was included in the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. Now, seven years later and we have yet to see working interoperable records between the two Departments. This is unacceptable and the Committee needs to know that progress is occurring and that this challenge will soon have a solution.

So welcome – I look forward to your testimony. At this time, I’d like to yield to my Ranking Member Pete Visclosky, for any comments he may wish to make.

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