

**Chairman John Culberson**  
**Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Department of Veterans Affairs**  
**FY 2015 Budget Hearing**  
**Secretary Eric K. Shinseki**  
**March 27, 2014**  
**Opening Statement As Prepared**

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Mr. Secretary, we are pleased to have you join us today to discuss your fiscal year 2015 budget request. You're really in a privileged position -- your discretionary budget has the largest increase proposed for any cabinet department -- by our scoring, nearly \$1.9 billion or 3 percent. The mandatory programs in your budget increase by a substantial \$8.8 billion, or more than 10 percent, to \$93.5 billion.

We know VA has made progress during the last year reducing the backlog of disability compensation claims, and that is welcome news. But the continuing backlog of more than 300,000 claims and the hardship the backlog causes for our brave veterans remain a blot on your record and is a source of frustration in every congressional office.

Since our hearing with you last year, the landscape on electronic health records has shifted dramatically. I think it is accurate to say that Members of the Committee on both sides of the aisle would have preferred that VA and DOD continue to develop a single integrated health record. But since the two departments have chosen separate paths instead, we have to put our emphasis on ensuring that the two records will be interoperable. We will be vigilant to make sure that after VA has spent billions of dollars on VistA, VA doctors will be able to exchange information with DOD and outside providers.

We will have questions for you on these topics and other areas in your budget request. We have your complete written statement and would ask you to summarize your remarks in about five minutes. Before you do that, I would ask our ranking Member, Mr. Bishop, if he has any opening remarks.

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