



Chairman John Culberson
*Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans
Affairs, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2015 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill
Subcommittee Markup
April 3, 2014
Opening Statement As Prepared

I believe this bill reflects our longstanding tradition of bipartisan support of our military, our veterans, and their families. We have immense responsibilities in our Subcommittee, and I can think of nothing more important than ensuring the peace of mind and quality of life for our veterans and military.

The bill before you was posted yesterday and you and your staffs have had an opportunity to review it. It includes \$71.5 billion in discretionary funding, which is \$1.8 billion less than fiscal year 2014 and \$398 million less than the budget request.

The bill provides the full budget request of \$6.6 billion for military construction projects. Although this is \$3.3 billion less than last year, we realize that the Department of Defense needs to complete the European Infrastructure Consolidation Study and assess force structure before requesting the construction projects that will be needed for the future.

The bill also includes \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs which is \$1.5 billion more than fiscal year 2014. This includes \$20 million more than was requested to get at the claims backlog and \$17 million more than was requested for the electronic health record

However, our responsibility to our veterans does not end at funding - we must ensure that the funds that are provided are used wisely. While we recognize that progress has been made, more needs to be done on the claims backlog - and while we have provided additional funding to speed the electronic health record program - it simply must be interoperable with the DOD health record. These are bipartisan concerns - and I have welcomed Mr. Bishop's - and all the Subcommittee Members' input. We take our oversight of these issues very seriously. Therefore language is included to: continue reporting requirements on the claims backlog; restrict the use of the 75 percent of the electronic health funds until the VA takes the next steps to assure that this record will be interoperable with DOD; and limit the availability of construction funds to five years so that veterans do not wait endlessly for the completion of a hospital.

With this bill, we have once again been able to protect the high-quality support and services provided to our troop, our veterans, and their families.

I want to thank all of the Members of the Subcommittee. I know that we have been moving quickly since the budget was released and I appreciate your hard work and responsiveness during these busy weeks. As always, I am very grateful to be working with such a terrific Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop. I know that he agrees that we are very fortunate to have Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey work with us on these issues - and our military and veterans can have no doubt of their support.

I would now like to ask my good friend from the State of Georgia and Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop, if he would like to make any remarks.

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