



Chairman Charlie Dent

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

FY 2016 Budget Hearing – Department of Veterans Affairs

March 4, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

Today, I'm pleased to welcome Secretary Robert A. McDonald, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, for his first appearance before the subcommittee, defending his fiscal year 2016 budget request. Mr. Secretary, we know you have a lot of material to present, and subcommittee Members have a lot of questions for you, so we appreciate you being willing to keep your opening remarks to within ten minutes. I will also keep my opening remarks to a minimum.

Secretary Bob, you come before us at a challenging time for the VA. You are trying to recover from the wait list scandal and implement the complex new Choice legislation. And you are trying to bring about a transformation of the agency to make it more veteran service-centric.

You are also defending an enormous increase in your discretionary budget [+\$5.1 billion – a 7.8 percent increase], which is financed by offsets in the President's budget that the Congress is very unlikely to accept. I have to be frank with you, Mr. Secretary. Any increases are going to be extremely difficult to fund under the constraints we have, and all Departments are going to be affected. Under the Budget Control Act, with a government-wide increase in the non-defense discretionary cap of \$1.1 billion, we can't make room for a \$5.1 billion increase without taking a machete to important programs in other subcommittees.

We truly appreciate the complex mission you have at VA and share your dedication to making it work better. You have a lot of great employees out there; when I visit facilities I am always impressed by your medical folks. The subcommittee welcomes the opportunity to learn about your vision for addressing the VA's problems and reforming the agency so that we are sure we are giving all veterans who want to use the VA the services they deserve.

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