



Chairman Charlie Dent

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

FY 2017 Budget Hearing: Department of Veterans Affairs

March 2, 2016

Opening Statement As Prepared

Mr. Secretary, we welcome you and your team here today to discuss your fiscal year 2017 budget request. I appreciate your visit to my office last week. As we discussed, your budget request and those of all non-defense agencies face a high hurdle this year. The generous increases proposed are built on a house of cards – redefining discretionary programs as mandatory and tax hikes for the middle class – that will not be entertained by this Congress. We have to work within the budget agreement we have, which, as I discussed with you, permits only a \$40 million increase across ALL non-defense subcommittees from the FY 2016 level. Your budget requests a \$3.6 billion increase, which has to be a non-starter in the current environment. In addition, you are in the unenviable position of having to pick up the costs of the Choice program, as the mandatory spending created by the authorizers runs dry, beginning in 2017 and in full force in 2018.

But we will be interested to hear your ideas about top funding priorities for VA and what you have been doing to improve the management of the department. The roster of officials accompanying you today is a clear sign of some of the management changes you have made. I don't think a single one attended our budget hearing last year. Before I ask you to introduce your team and provide a summary of your written statement, I'll ask our Ranking Member Mr. Bishop if he would like to make any opening remarks.

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