

The Honorable Julia Brownley
Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs
February 16, 2017

Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2018 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act.

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs portfolio includes a number of important priorities for my district, and I'm pleased to have the opportunity to share them with the Subcommittee. As the proud representative of Naval Base Ventura County, I represent over 19,000 personnel that work hard every day to keep our nation secure. And as a proud member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am honored to represent nearly 40,000 veterans in my Congressional District, as well as veterans across the country. We have an extensive military tradition in my region, and it's my pleasure to stand up for our priorities today.

With more than 80 tenant commands, Naval Base Ventura County is a strategic asset to our national security, and will play an even greater role in our national defense as the Department of Defense continues to re-focus and shift attention towards the Asia-Pacific region. Naval Base Ventura County is also home to our Pacific Seabees, the United States Navy Construction Battalion (CB). Since World War II, the Seabees have built military bases, bulldozing and paving thousands of miles of roads and airstrips, which have been integral to the success of the U.S. armed forces in combat theaters world-wide. Our highly-skilled and specially trained

Seabees can rapidly deploy and prepare for various overseas contingencies, including humanitarian assistance missions.

Naval Base Ventura County -- comprising a total of over 19,000 land acres, plus a 36,000 square mile Sea Range -- provides the Navy with a diverse and expansive training area, helping prepare our sailors for a wide-variety of situations that they may encounter across the globe.

I am concerned; however, that deferred maintenance at our base is negatively impacting the Navy's ability to conduct test and evaluation of critical new systems. For instance, deferred maintenance of the Missile Assembly Storage Facility and Surface Target Assembly Buildings at Naval Base Ventura County, are limiting the Navy's ability to evaluate our defenses against sea-skimming missiles and boat swarms.

The 2016 National Defense Authorization Act required the Department of Defense to report to Congress on the backlog of construction and maintenance needs at Major Range and Test Facility Bases. The report completed in March 2016 estimated the total cost to bring our Major Range and Test Facility Bases from their current "poor" or "failing" grade up to "good" or "fair" condition is \$1.2 billion. Therefore, I urge the Committee to provide more resources for our Major Range and Test Facility Bases to address aging infrastructure and assets.

Regarding our nation's veterans, I hope to bring continued attention to the authorizing problem that has created a logjam preventing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from leasing new facilities. All across the country, there are veterans waiting for care because Congress has failed

to authorize 24 leases for Fiscal Year 2016 and Fiscal Year 2017. While this Committee has already appropriated funding to pay for these facilities, a bureaucratic dispute with Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has prevented the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, on which I serve, from moving authorizing legislation forward. Thus, there are 24 communities in 15 different states all across the country where veterans continue to be underserved because VA cannot open larger facilities to serve the community's needs.

The demand for VA healthcare is increasing, and many veterans who are trying to access VA care face long wait times and outdated facilities that are too small, with too few exam rooms and too few providers to meet the demand for care. This is not just about better access to health care; it is a call for more equitable access to care for our veterans. The VA's inability to plan and execute leases for capital needs in a timely manner is a fundamental problem that affects Democratic and Republican districts across the country.

As I said, the Appropriations Committee has already provided the funding needed for these facilities, but an issue with CBO scoring is holding up the authorization. I hope we can bring renewed attention to this critical health care issue for veterans, and find a bipartisan way forward. I would be grateful to the Committee if you could help us solve this problem and include language in the appropriations bill to address this matter.

Finally I'll note that it has been my pleasure to work with Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz and Congressman Larsen's offices to ensure that veterans with service-connected reproductive challenges have access to fertility treatments. The brave men and women who have been

wounded in the line-of-duty deserve the opportunity to start a family and the support of a grateful nation in that endeavor. The 2017 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act included language to ensure that veterans who sustained a service-connected injury impacting their fertility have access to In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and adoption services.

The VA is moving forward with a rulemaking on this. However, I believe the agency has misinterpreted Congressional intent. VA proposes to only provide coverage for the next two years. I believe that Congress must ensure this earned benefit is permanently protected. I hope we can continue to work together in a bipartisan manner to make a technical correction to ensure that VA properly interprets Congressional intent and makes IVF and adoption services a permanent benefit.

Again, I appreciate the Committee's continued willingness to listen to the views of Members, including myself, who represent our proud military personnel at bases across the country. I look forward to working with you to ensure the upcoming Fiscal Year 2018 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act supports the critical missions of our armed forces, and maintains our solemn obligation to our servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for holding this hearing and look forward to working with you in the coming year. Thank you.