



Chairman Charlie Dent

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

Department of Veterans Affairs Oversight

May 3, 2017

Opening Statement As Prepared

Today we're pleased to welcome back Dr. David Shulkin, the new Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The last time you appeared before us you were the VA Undersecretary for Health. Now you've been kicked upstairs, after a unanimous Senate confirmation vote. With your health background, you bring a lot of expertise to the job, although I am sure there are days that the challenges are daunting.

We realize this hearing is a little unusual. Rather than the typical budget hearing we would usually have at this time of year, we are limited to a discussion of the "skinny budget" materials OMB sent to the Hill in March. The two-page entry for VA doesn't give us much to go on in terms of program priorities or plans for the Choice successor program.

But the skinny budget does give us one remarkable bit of news for VA – apparently the Administration is proposing a \$4.4 billion, or 6 percent, funding increase for the agency. In addition, there is \$2.9 billion proposed in new mandatory funding for VA. You must be the only domestic Federal agency not facing a substantial cut. I may need a Kevlar vest when talking to my fellow appropriations subcommittee chairmen. When we see your full budget later this month, we'll be asking some tough questions about the merits of your proposed increases when we know other agencies will be struggling.

Despite not having a complete budget, I'm sure Members will find plenty of VA topics to ask you about today – how you envision VA striking a balance between care in VA facilities versus non-VA community facilities; making the electronic health record work for veterans, especially as they see more doctors through Choice; your efforts to tackle appointment scheduling problems; how you plan to approach disability claim backlogs and appeals; your plans to decrease veteran suicide and homelessness; your campaign to limit opioid abuse among veterans; plans to increase access to care for rural and female veterans – and that's just a start.

Mr. Secretary, we'll include your full statement in the hearing record and will be pleased to hear your oral statement. But before you begin, I'll ask our ranking Member, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, if she has any opening comments she would like to make.

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