

**Honorable Jeff Miller**  
**Chairman**  
**Committee on Veterans' Affairs**  
**House Administration Funding Hearing**  
**1310 Longworth House Office Building**  
**February 4, 2015**  
*Topic: COMMITTEE BUDGET FOR 2015*  
*Up to 5 Mins.*

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**THANK YOU CHAIRMAN MILLER AND RANKING MEMBER BRADY FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR BEFORE YOUR COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS BUDGET FOR THE 114TH CONGRESS.**

**RANKING MEMBER CORRINE BROWN JOINS ME HERE TODAY.**

**WE HAVE SUBMITTED OUR FUNDING REQUEST FORMS FOR 2015 PER YOUR COMMITTEE'S GUIDANCE.**

**I WILL BEGIN BY RECOUNTING WHAT WAS AN EXTRAORDINARILY PRODUCTIVE YEAR FOR THE COMMITTEE FROM BOTH AN OVERSIGHT AND LEGISLATIVE STANDPOINT. I'M REALLY PROUD OF THE WORK WE WERE ABLE TO DO WITH A LEANER BUDGET. BUT, AS I WILL DETAIL IN A MOMENT, ONE OF THE BIG LESSONS LEARNED IS THAT CONSTANT AND AGGRESSIVE OVERSIGHT IS ESSENTIAL IF THE PROBLEMS THAT PLAGUE THE VA ARE EVER TO BE FIXED.**

**AS YOU KNOW, THE COMMITTEE HAS OVERSIGHT OVER THE ENTIRE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, AS WELL AS OVER VARIOUS PROGRAMS SERVING VETERANS AT THE DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR AND DEFENSE, OVER ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, AND OTHER MATTERS.**

**THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IS THE SECOND LARGEST FEDERAL AGENCY, EMPLOYING ALMOST THREE HUNDRED AND FORTY THOUSAND PEOPLE WITH A BUDGET OF ROUGHLY ONE HUNDRED SIXTY BILLION DOLLARS.**

**LAST YEAR, NOTWITHSTANDING A LEANER COMMITTEE BUDGET, WE WERE ABLE TO UNCOVER AND BRING TO PUBLIC LIGHT WHAT MAY BE THE LARGEST SCANDAL IN VA HISTORY. NAMELY, VETERANS ACROSS THE VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM WERE WAITING MONTHS FOR THEIR CARE EVEN THOUGH OFFICIAL WAIT TIME DATA SUGGESTED THEY WERE NOT.**

**AFTER THE COMMITTEE EXPOSED THE WAIT TIME MANIUPULATION SCANDAL AT THE PHOENIX VA MEDICAL CENTER, WE EMBARKED ON A SERIES OF HEARINGS –MANY LASTING PAST MIDNIGHT – TO GET AT THE ROOT CAUSES OF THE SCANDAL. WE HEARD FROM WHISTLEBLOWERS WHOSE WARNINGS WERE IGNORED; IG AND GAO WITNESSES WHO TOLD US THE PROBLEMS WERE LONG-STANDING AND SYSTEMIC; AND PRIVATE SECTOR EXPERTS WHO SUGGESTED A PATH FORWARD TOWARD REFORM.**

**THE CULIMINATION OF THE COMMITTEE’S WORK WAS ENACTMENT OF THE VETERANS’ ACCESS, CHOICE, AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2014. THIS LANDMARK LEGISLATION ALLOCATED \$10 BILLION FOR A FIRST-OF-ITS KIND PROGRAM ALLOWING VETERANS WAITING FOR CARE AT VA TO OBTAIN IT IN THE COMMUNITY.**

**IT ALLOCATED \$5 BILLION FOR INTERNAL VA HIRING AND INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS.**

**AND IT PUT IN PLACE A NEW STREAMLINED PROCESS AVAILABLE TO THE VA SECRETARY MAKING IT EASIER TO HOLD SENIOR EXECUTIVES ACCOUNTABLE.**

**NEEDLESS TO SAY, OVERSIGHT OF THE ELEMENTS OF THAT LAW ALONE WILL KEEP US VERY BUSY THIS CONGRESS.**

**I THINK THE KEY LESSON THAT WE LEARNED LAST YEAR IS THAT THE COMMITTEE MUST TAKE A “TRUST BUT VERIFY” APPROACH WITH THE INFORMATION PRESENTED TO US BY VA.**

**WE DISCOVERED A SERIOUS DISCONNECT BETWEEN WHAT WAS BEING TOLD TO US IN WASHINGTON D.C. BY VA LEADERSHIP AND WHAT WAS ACTUALLY HAPPENING IN THE FIELD.**

**TO ENSURE THAT WE HAVE SUFFICIENT ABILITY TO GET THE REAL-WORLD PICTURE ON NOT JUST WAIT TIMES AT HOSPITALS AND CLINCS, BUT ALSO VA’S DISABILITY CLAIMS PROCESSING EFFORTS; HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS WORTH OF ANNUAL PROCUREMENT CONTRACTS; NEAR-BILLION DOLLAR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS; AND MYRIAD OTHER ISSUES, WE NEED STAFF EXPERTISE AND A TRAVEL BUDGET ORIENTED TOWARDS MEETING THESE VAST NEEDS.**

**ON THE MAJORITY STAFF WE CURRENTLY HAVE FOUR INVESTIGATORS. MY HOPE IS TO DOUBLE OUR INVESTIGATIVE CAPACITY BY HIRING A MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR, AN ACQUISITION/PROCUREMENT SPECIALIST, A CYBER-**

**SECURITY SPECIALIST, AND AN INVESTIGATOR WHO SPECIALIZES IN FORENSIC ANALYSIS.**

**THESE INDIVIDUALS WOULD PRIMARILY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SITE VISITS AROUND THE COUNTRY, DIGGING DEEP INTO FACILITY OPERATIONS TO ENSURE THAT THE STORY BEING TOLD BY VA LEADERSHIP IN WASHINGTON IS WHAT IS BEING EXECUTED IN THE FIELD.**

**ACCORDINGLY, WE ARE REQUESTING A \$600,000 INCREASE IN THE COMMITTEE'S PERSONNEL BUDGET AND A \$70,000 INCREASE IN THE COMMITTEE'S TRAVEL BUDGET. RELATIVE TO THE SIZE OF THE PRIMARY AGENCY THE COMMITTEE OVERSEES, I HOPE WE CAN ALL AGREE THIS IS A MODEST INVESTMENT TO MAKE.**

**A TRAVEL BUDGET IN LINE WITH OUR REQUEST WILL ENABLE US TO MOVE COMPLETELY AWAY FROM RELYING ON VA'S RESOURCES TO SUPPORT OUR OVERSIGHT.**

**I'VE TESTIFIED TO THIS IN THE PAST, BUT RELIANCE ON VA FOR TRAVEL PUTS THE DEPARTMENT ON ADVANCE NOTICE EACH TIME THE COMMITTEE ENGAGES IN AN OVERSIGHT VISIT.**

**TURNING TO EQUIPMENT, LAST YEAR WE OBLIGATED END-OF-YEAR AVAILABLE FUNDS TO MEET SIGNIFICANT BUT SCHEDULED UPGRADES NECESSARY TO REPLACE OUTDATED SERVERS, COMPUTERS, AND A POORLY FUNCTIONING COPIER. THUS, WE ARE NOT REQUESTING ANY INCREASE FOR THE COMMITTEE'S EQUIPMENT NEEDS.**

**THIS IS A SMALL COMMITTEE CHARGED WITH AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY:  
OVERSIGHT OF THOSE WHO CARE AND PROVIDE SERVICES FOR OUR  
NATION'S WARRIORS AND THEIR FAMILIES.  
IN DOING SO, WE HAVE EXERCISED EXTREME FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY.**

**WE ACCOMPLISHED A GREAT DEAL FOR OUR VETERANS WITH ONE OF THE  
SMALLEST COMMITTEE BUDGETS IN THE ENTIRE CONGRESS.**

**MADAME CHAIRMAN, YOU HAVE MY ASSURANCE THAT WE WILL CONTINUE  
TO ACCOUNT FOR, AND STRETCH, EVERY DOLLAR AFFORDED US AS WE OUT-  
STRIDE THE EXPECTATIONS PLACED UPON US.**

**BUT MY HUMBLE REQUEST OF YOU, THE RANKING MEMBER, AND THE  
MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE, IS THAT WE BUILD ON THE OVERSIGHT  
SUCCESS OF THE VETERANS' COMMITTEE LAST CONGRESS WITH THESE  
SMALL, BUT IMPORTANT, ADDITIONS TO OUR BUDGET THAT I HAVE  
OUTLINED.**

**THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY. I  
KNOW MS. BROWN WILL HAVE MORE TO SAY ON THE WORK WE'VE DONE  
TOGETHER AND WHAT WE PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THIS CONGRESS.**

**I WOULD BE GLAD TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.**