

Opening Statement
Hon. Mike Bost
Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House Committee on Administration Funding Resolution Testimony
Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Steil and Ranking Member Morelle for the opportunity to discuss the Committee on Veterans' Affairs budget for the 118th Congress.

Ranking Member Mark Takano joins me here today.

We have submitted our funding request forms for the 118th Congress per your Committee's guidance.

As you know, the Committee has oversight of the entire:

- Department of Veterans Affairs,
- Various programs serving veterans at the Departments of Labor and Defense,
- Arlington National Cemetery and our overseas cemeteries, as well as other matters.

All to ensure that V.A. is meeting their mission for the over 9 million veterans, their families, and their survivors they serve every single day. V.A. is the second largest federal agency and the largest integrated healthcare system in the country.

Employing over 380 thousand people with a budget of \$303 billion dollars this fiscal year. Since 2017, V.A. has seen budgetary growth of over \$120 billion dollars and employee growth of nearly 20,000.

To put that in perspective, the number of employees added to the V.A. workforce in the last 6 years alone, is roughly equivalent to three times the population of my hometown of Murphysboro, Illinois!

Needless to say, oversight of such a vastly growing government agency is critical. Ensuring effective stewardship of taxpayer dollars is essential for the delivery of care and services to veterans. And waste of those dollars is unacceptable.

We owe it to veterans and taxpayers to ensure V.A. is making marked progress regarding:

- veterans' access to healthcare;
- wait times at hospitals and clinics;
- proper use of the Mission Act;
- the backlog of disability claims;
- implementation of the electronic health record; and more recently,
- the implementation of the PACT Act.

To accomplish the mission, the committee needs essential, talented staff expertise.

Accordingly, we request a 4% increase in the committee's annual personnel budget for 2024. Relative to the size of the primary agency the committee oversees, I hope we can all agree this is a modest investment to make.

At this time, we are not requesting additional resources for committee travel or equipment needs.

With the current budget allotted for travel, the committee has independently been able to conduct vitally important investigations of whistleblower complaints at various V.A. facilities across the country.

These investigations are essential for establishing an accurate picture of what is happening on the ground, relative to what we're being told here in Washington D.C.

Mr. Chairman, you have my assurance that we will continue to account for, and stretch, every dollar afforded us as we meet and exceed 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 successes we have made in recent years with this small addition to our personnel budget that I previously mentioned.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I know Mr. Takano will have more to say on the bipartisan work the committee has done together, and what we plan to accomplish this Congress for veterans and their families.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have, and I yield back.