



Chairman Charlie Dent

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

FULL COMMITTEE Markup- Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies FY 2019 Appropriations Bill

Opening Statement (as prepared)

May 8, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Frelinghuysen, for the opportunity to bring this bill before the full Committee this morning—the first appropriations bill of the year.

The Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies bill provides generously for our servicemembers, our veterans, their families, and our monuments and cemeteries. Chairman Frelinghuysen and Mrs. Lowey have provided strong support for this bill. I appreciate the full committee Chairman and Ranking Member's leadership and the participation of all the members of the subcommittee, especially our Ranking Member, Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who brings a great deal of energy and determination to the role. And I would like to thank our Committee staff on both sides – Sue, Matt, Sarah, Kiya, and Tracey, as well as my personal office staffer, Caitlin Wilson.

I don't want to be maudlin, but I can't let my last appearance as a subcommittee chairman pass without saying how much it has meant to me to work with my colleagues here. In the midst of confusion and paralysis, people on the Committee continue to GET THE JOB DONE. I think that, left to our own devices, shutdowns, omnibus bills, and long-term CRs would be distant memories. So, thank you for having me on the team.

Continuing the Appropriations Committee's long tradition of transparency and consultation, as we assembled this year's bill, we made an effort to incorporate 1,300 Member requests from both sides of the aisle.

Now, for the numbers. The bill contains \$96.9 billion in budget authority, an increase of \$4.2 billion over last year's level.

The funding recommendation includes:

- \$11.3 billion for Military Construction, which is \$412 million, or 3.8 percent, increase over the fiscal year 2018 level. This funding recommendation reinforces the priorities in the President’s budget request. The bill includes \$10.3 billion in base funding and \$921 million in Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding. The level is \$131 million below the request.
- \$85.3 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is an increase of nearly \$4 billion, or 4.8 percent over the FY 18 level, and the same as the budget request. Of the \$85.3 billion provided for VA, \$71.2 billion is for medical care for 7 million veterans. We make important investments in many VA programs, including mental health treatment and suicide prevention, research, and claims processing, at or above the budget request. \$2 billion is provided as the second year of the budget deal commitment for infrastructure funding for VA facilities.
- \$317 million is for the Related Agencies in our bill --the American Battle Monuments Commission, Arlington National Cemetery, the Armed Forces Retirement Home, and the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. We were able to reallocate funds to provide \$74 million for the Arlington Cemetery Southern Expansion to guarantee burial space through 2050.

This bill supports our troops with the facilities and services necessary to maintain readiness and morale at bases here in the States and around the world. It is extremely important that we get our infrastructure in shape to support the force we have now as well as the force we want to grow in the future.

And the bill funds our veteran healthcare systems to ensure that our promise to care for those who have sacrificed in defense of the nation is met as those men and women return home. We owe this to our vets and are committed to sustained oversight so that programs deliver what they promise, and taxpayers are well served by the investments we make.

I urge you to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I yield back.

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