



# **Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen**

## *House Committee on Appropriations*

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**Full Committee Markup – FY 2019 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs and  
Legislative Branch Appropriations Bills  
May 8, 2018  
Opening Statement As Prepared**

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Good morning, and welcome to our first Full Committee markup of the Fiscal Year 2019 Appropriations cycle. Today, we will consider the Fiscal Year 2019 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Legislative Branch Appropriations Bills.

By the end of this week, the Committee will have held nearly 75 budget hearings, including opportunities for all Members to make their marks on our bills. The “power of the purse” lies with the Congress, and it is our job to make these important spending decisions on behalf of the American people.

These hearings help us draft responsible bills like the two we are marking up today. I want to thank you all – Members and staff – for your time and hard work completing this important oversight, particularly over such an abbreviated time period. In particular, I want to thank Mrs. Lowey for her ongoing partnership and commitment to the Appropriations process.

In marking up the fiscal year 2019 appropriation bills, we will be marking to the overall 302(a) totals, as set forth in the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 that was signed into law in February. The total levels in the Military Construction VA and Leg Branch bills before us today are fully consistent with the numbers and principles of the BBA. The Full Committee will consider 302(b)s in a subsequent committee meeting.

Before we turn to the matters at hand, it’s time for our annual reminder about our Flower Fund, which is used to send flowers or food baskets to the family of a Member who has experienced an illness, lost a family member, or is celebrating the birth of a child. I encourage each Member to make a contribution of \$20 to the fund today or in the future. Please give your contributions to our co-chairs, Scott Taylor and Pete Aguilar.

I would now like to recognize the Full Committee Ranking Member, Mrs. Lowey, for any general opening remarks she may have.

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## *House Committee on Appropriations*

### **Full Committee Markup – FY 2019 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill May 8, 2018 Opening Statement As Prepared**

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I am pleased that once again we are kicking off our markup season with the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bills, because our most important responsibility as Members of Congress is to provide for the common defense – including the men and women who serve and have served our nation in uniform.

This is a particularly crucial time for both our Armed Forces and the VA.

We are working to rebuild our military, and to address the many significant issues that are plaguing the VA and preventing our veterans and our service men and women from getting the best care possible. This bill contains a total increase of \$4.2 billion above current levels, building on the significant investments we made in the FY18 Omnibus.

This includes a total of \$11.3 billion for military construction projects – a 3.8 percent increase above FY18 levels.

This funding will enable our military to fight current and emerging threats around the globe, as well as sustain the quality-of-life programs that our service members and their families rely on, including housing, and medical and educational facilities.

The bill also includes a total of \$85.3 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs – an increase of \$3.9 billion above current levels. These additional funds are directed to critical priorities within the VA – improved access to health care, quicker claims processing, and support for crucial programs like suicide prevention and mental health outreach and opioid abuse prevention. This includes \$1.2 billion for the new VA electronic health record to expedite this long-awaited project, which is aimed at merging the DOD system with the VA's.

The legislation strengthens oversight and accountability at both the VA and the Pentagon. Millions of veterans rely on the VA system, and we need to ensure they are getting the treatment they deserve, without wasting precious taxpayer dollars. This bill includes rigorous reporting requirements, and greater protection for whistleblowers.

Again, I want to thank Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, and the subcommittee for producing a bill that fulfills our duties to those who serve and fight for our freedom. They deserve peace of mind during and after they leave active service. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

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### **Full Committee Markup – FY 2019 Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill May 8, 2018 Opening Statement As Prepared**

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Thank you both for your remarks. I'm grateful for your work on this bill. Your subcommittee was serious about your oversight responsibilities – holding 9 hearings in just a few weeks – to ensure that this bill reflects the greatest needs of the Legislative Branch.

The People's House – the U.S. Capitol – is a symbol of American freedom. The funding in this bill preserves this institution and protects those that visit it.

The bill totals \$3.8 billion. This bill prioritizes the safety and security of the U.S. Capitol, Members of Congress and staffs, and the hundreds of thousands of Americans who visit it each year.

This includes salary increases for the Capitol Police, to enhance security functions and screening, and funding for the Architect of the Capitol to address essential projects that maintain public access to this historic complex.

Cybersecurity is also prioritized, with additional funding directed to IT enhancements. I'm also pleased that the bill continues important funding for mandatory workplace rights training and the Office of Compliance.

These investments are necessary, and I'm pleased we are able to support these efforts with this bill.

Chairman Yoder also made it a priority to keep this budget tight, rejecting waste, bolstering oversight and transparency, and trimming funding wherever possible, working closely with Mr. Ryan.

The bill also provides important funding for the Government Accountability Office to ensure that Congress receives accurate, nonpartisan reporting on how taxpayer dollars are spent.

As I noted at our subcommittee markup, it is truly an honor and a privilege to come to this building every day on behalf of the American people. This bill enables us to continue that important work, and I believe we can all be proud to do so with the backing of this bill.

Thank you, Chairman Yoder, Ranking Member Ryan, and the subcommittee for your work on this bill. I urge the Committee's support.

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