

Representative Veronica Escobar (TX-16)
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
5- Minute Remarks: Member Day Hearing

Thank you, Chairwoman Wasserman Schultz, Ranking Member Carter, and Members of the subcommittee for giving me this opportunity to testify on some of my priorities for the subcommittee.

As you begin work on the fiscal year 2022 Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, I respectfully request that you give consideration to the following funding priorities: barracks and rail infrastructural modernization at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas.

As a representative for the district where Fort Bliss is located, my community knows and sees first-hand the needs of our military personnel and servicemembers.

This subcommittee has historically helped maintain our servicemembers at the highest level of readiness as our nation continues to face new threats and challenges domestically and abroad.

Part of maintaining readiness involves providing adequate housing and the newest technologies, capabilities and infrastructure to the Armed Forces as well as the National Guard and Reserve components.

In an effort to further enhance and maintain readiness, I would like to urge this subcommittee to consider providing funding to refurbish and modernize housing installations or barracks located at the training ranges in Fort Bliss.

Many of us have visited military installations and have been shocked by the poor conditions of barracks that house our servicemembers— conditions that must be addressed to mitigate issues of safety, security, and the overall wellbeing of servicemembers.

As you may know, Fort Bliss provides one of the largest training platforms in the Department of the Army and the Department of Defense, housing training exercises, and the largest mobilization and demobilization platform for National Guard and Reserve components of all 50 States and territories.

Therefore, I hope this subcommittee considers providing more funding for the Military Construction and Army accounts to address these needs and ensure that our servicemembers, who put their lives on the line for our country, have access to quality housing.

Additionally, I would also like to request that funding be appropriated towards rail head infrastructure at military installations like Fort Bliss.

I remain concerned that installations like ours with rapid deployment requirements have insufficient rail and transportation logistics infrastructure to efficiently move equipment in support of deployments, training operations, and evolving Army requirements.

For example, Fort Bliss has only one railhead connection point for its deployment and redeployment activities.

In Fiscal Year 2019, Fort Bliss supported the mobilization of 72,329 Service Members using that railhead alone.

Additionally, as a Joint Mobilization Force Generation Installation (JMFGI), Fort Bliss supports First Army for the mobilization, life support, training and validation, deployment, redeployment and demobilization of National Guard (NG) and Reserve Component (RC) units.

Fort Bliss is also the only installation with a Continental United States (CONUS) Replacement Center (CRC). This makes Fort Bliss the ONLY JMFGI in the Army.

To give you a better sense of the strain placed on the one existing railhead, I would like to highlight that Fort Bliss CRC processes members across several agencies: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Red Cross, FBI, Border Patrol, DoD Civilians and Contractors. These personnel support missions across 5 continents: North and South America, Africa, Europe, Asia. 32 Countries in all.

Increased funding to support the modernization of the current railhead and the addition of another one is critical for Fort Bliss and my community in El Paso as a whole.

Given that, I hope this subcommittee can conduct a review of rail and transport logistics infrastructure and equipment deployment methods at installations with rapid deployment requirements, and submit the review and a plan to address the issues identified in the review by the end of the fiscal year to the congressional defense committees no later than 90 days after the enactment of this Act.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize with this subcommittee, as I have with other appropriation subcommittees that I have testified in front of, that it is essential you include mechanisms within your bill to guarantee and ensure federal funding makes it to its designated recipient.

In 2019, we saw the Trump Administration illegally sidestep Congress, and divert \$2.5 billion crucial military construction funding to build sections of the U.S. border wall with Mexico. We cannot allow for funding that we allocate for specific, vital, and *necessary* military construction projects to be unlawfully transferred elsewhere or be tampered with.

Thank you all for your time and consideration, and for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to collaborating with the subcommittee as you continue to draft the final appropriation bill.