

Honorable Jeff Miller
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House Administration Funding Hearing
1310 Longworth House Office Building
March 5, 2013
Topic: COMMITTEE BUDGET FOR 2013
Up to 5 Mins.

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 113th Congress.

Ranking Member Mike Michaud joins me here today.

We have submitted our funding request forms for 2013 per your Committee's guidance on budget reduction amounts.

As in the past, we have no choice but to find those savings from decreasing our personnel budget and continuing to combine and consolidate administrative responsibilities. And, we will make some tough decisions on equipment and travel if further cut.

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 over three hundred thousand people with a budget of roughly one hundred forty billion dollars.

Due to budget constraints, we perform our oversight role with only twenty-five of the Committee's thirty-six staff slots filled; sixteen majority and nine minority. Further illustrating our lean operations, we currently have an Oversight and Investigations majority staff of only three. Adding an investigator as a fourth staffer is a necessity this Congress.

We also need to hire an additional person in our Health Subcommittee. We currently have only two staffers overseeing the nation's largest integrated health

care system. Most Member travel in accordance with the Committee's oversight duties falls within the Health Subcommittee's jurisdiction, and that preparation falls to this small staff. Additionally, the very high volume of health-related bills introduced in the House and referred and requiring the analysis of this Subcommittee warrants a third staff member.

I am very proud that we did return money last Congress given the Committee's commitment to living within its means. We did not fully staff the majority to allow us some flexibility within our budget reduction for any unforeseen expenses, and so that we would not find ourselves in the undesirable position of having to let people go. But, that does not negate the critical need we have to fill the vacancies I have discussed.

The Full Committee again has an aggressive oversight plan and has already engaged in oversight in several of the many areas included. As was the case last Congress, we hope to be able to afford each Subcommittee Chairman and Ranking Member an opportunity to hold a field hearing on an oversight matter important to their respective Subcommittee. We will also hold Full Committee oversight hearings as the need arises. This will require the retention of our extremely modest travel budget.

The vast majority of the Committee travel in which our Members engage is funded by the VA, the very agency over which we are charged with oversight. While this may seem ideal, it also puts the Department on advance notice each time the Committee engages in an oversight visit.

Turning to equipment, last year we upgraded one-third of our computer equipment using end of year available funds but will need to upgrade another third this year and then again in 2014. We also replaced a correspondence management system that has not been updated in eight years and will cost us approximately five thousand dollars a month for maintenance and support. The previous system was no longer technically supportable.

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. Any further cuts will be challenging but, in keeping with our practices of the past two years, we are anticipating and planning for them.

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. My humble request of you, and this Committee, is that our Committee not be punished for our good stewardship of the taxpayers' money.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I would be glad to answer any questions you may have.