

# *House Appropriations Committee*

## *Chairman Hal Rogers*

Website address: <http://appropriations.house.gov/>

### **FY 2015 Omnibus – Military Construction/Veterans Affairs** **Appropriations**

*Legislation includes funding for key infrastructure projects, medical records system, and veterans claims processing*

The fiscal year 2015 Omnibus includes funding for key military infrastructure projects to support our troops and their families at home and abroad. It also includes increased funding to meet our obligations to our nation's veterans – including helping to increase the efficiency and interoperability of the combined Department of Defense (DoD)/Veteran Affairs (VA) medical records system, and to reduce the claims backlog at the VA. The discretionary total for the Military Construction/VA portion of the Omnibus is \$71.8 billion – \$1.5 billion below the enacted fiscal year 2014 level – reflecting a decline in military construction, while funding for VA programs and services is increased. The bill also includes \$221 million in Overseas Contingency Operations funds for military construction.

**Military Construction** – The bill provides \$6.6 billion for military construction projects – a decrease of \$3.3 billion below the enacted fiscal year 2014 level – largely due to a reduction in new projects. The funds will provide for large and small construction and rehabilitation projects on military bases at home and abroad that support our troops and their families.

- **Military Family Housing** – The bill provides \$1.2 billion to fund construction, operation, and maintenance of military family housing for fiscal year 2015. This is \$325 million below the enacted fiscal year 2014 level, a result of savings from the privatization of family housing. The funding will ensure quality housing is continued for 1,926,500 military families.
- **Military Medical Facilities** – The bill includes \$416 million for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities. These facilities support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including our wounded troops abroad.
- **Department of Defense (DoD) Education Facilities** – The bill includes \$394.5 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at seven DoD Education Activities facilities located within the U.S. and overseas. This funding will help address health, safety, and efficiency problems at these facilities for military children and families.
- **Guard and Reserve** – The bill includes \$427 million for construction or alteration of Guard and Reserve facilities in 18 states.

**Veterans Affairs (VA)** – The legislation includes a total of \$159.1 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This funding will help provide our nation's veterans with the services and care they have earned from their dedicated service to the country.

Discretionary funding for VA programs in the agreement is \$65 billion – \$1.8 billion above the enacted fiscal year 2014 level.

- **VA Medical Services** – The agreement funds VA medical services at \$45.2 billion – providing care and treatment for approximately 6.7 million veterans. This includes: \$7.2 billion in mental health care services; \$133 million in suicide prevention activities; \$229 million for traumatic brain injury treatment; \$7.4 billion in homeless veterans treatment, services, housing, and job training; and \$250 million in rural health initiatives.

The bill includes \$209 million to help address new costs related to the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 – such as hiring medical staff and expanding facility capacity – and to implement the Caregivers Act, which provides stipends and other assistance to families of seriously wounded veterans.

- **DoD-VA Electronic Health Record** – The bill provides \$344 million to help ensure that the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs are developing electronic health records that will seamlessly transfer medical information. The legislation also includes language to require the VA to create a truly interoperable, working system – in a timely and cost-effective fashion – to help prevent unnecessary mistakes or delays in veterans’ medical care. If goals are not met, a portion of the funding will not be released.
- **Disability Claims Processing Backlog** – To assist the VA in meeting its goal of ending the disability compensation claims backlog by the end of 2015, the bill includes \$2.5 billion for the costs of processing disability claims. This level is an increase of \$40 million over the President’s request and \$69 million over the fiscal year 2014 level. Language is also included directing that the \$40 million increase be used to support digital scanning of claims, to hire additional claims processors in regional offices, and for the centralized mail initiative. Funding for the Board of Veterans Appeals is increased by \$11 million over fiscal year 2014, for a total of \$99 million, to address the looming appeals backlog.
- **Construction** – Major Construction within the VA is funded at \$562 million – the same as the President’s request and \$220 million above the fiscal year 2014 enacted level. Funds will be used for correcting critical seismic deficiencies and repairing crumbling infrastructure in some of the VA’s oldest structures.
- **VA Mandatory Funding** – The agreement fulfills mandatory funding requirements such as: veteran disability compensation programs for 4.6 million veterans and their survivors; post-9-11 GI bill education benefits for more than 851,000 veterans; and vocational rehabilitation and employment training for more than 149,000 veterans.
- **Oversight** – The legislation includes provisions to increase oversight of taxpayer dollars at the VA, including requiring the agency to report on construction expenditures and savings, forbidding changes in the scope of construction projects, and restricting the agency from taking certain spending actions without notifying Congress.

To help address issues related to the “wait list” scandal at the VA, funding for the VA Office of Inspector General is increased by \$5 million over the fiscal year 2014 level to provide the resources necessary to continue the Office’s audits of hospital appointment scheduling and lapses in patient care. The legislation also includes language directing the VA Office of the Medical

Inspector to report on problems or deficiencies in the implementation of its recommendations, and on any violations of law by VA employees.

**Advance Appropriations for Veterans Medical Programs** – The agreement contains \$58.7 billion in advance fiscal year 2016 funding for the VA – the same level provided in the House budget resolution. This funding will provide for medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities, and ensure that our veterans have continued, full access to their medical care.

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