

Chairman John Culberson
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Full Committee Mark Up
Fiscal Year 2014 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill
May 21, 2013
Opening Statement As Prepared

Thank you, Chairman Rogers for giving me the opportunity to work on this bill – and thank you for your leadership on veterans issues, particularly on the electronic health record. It has also been a great pleasure to work with our Ranking Members, Ms. Lowey and Mr. Bishop – they are equally committed to ensuring that our military, our veterans, and their families have what they need and have earned as a result of the sacrifices that they have made for our freedom.

I would also like to thank each Member of the Subcommittee for the time they spent attending hearings and for the language items they provided in the bill and report.

The bill includes \$73.3 billion in discretionary funding, an increase of \$1.4 billion above the fiscal year 2013 enacted level and \$1.4 billion less than the budget request. It is important to note that the fiscal year 2013 appropriations bill included a fiscal year 2014 advance appropriation for the VA medical accounts that was \$1.9 billion more than fiscal year 2013 – and that this increase needed to be absorbed within our allocation.

The funding provided continues our longstanding tradition of bipartisan support of our military, our veterans, and their families. However, despite years of providing substantial increases to the Department of Veterans Affairs, funds have languished as a result of construction delays, the claims backlog grows at an astounding rate, and the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs are, once again, back to square one in the development of a joint electronic health record. So the bill also sends a clear message that this state of affairs is unacceptable – and that our veterans deserve to receive the benefits that they need and have earned in a timely, efficient manner. Therefore, while this bill continues to support these activities, it also increases oversight of them. Funding is no longer provided without expiration for VA construction – bid savings must be reported and project scope changes are prohibited, aggressive monthly reporting from each regional office is required to monitor progress on the disability claims backlog, and bill language has been included to restrict IT funding until the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs select one single integrated electronic health record.

I have said many times at the hearings this year that our warfighters should not have the added burden of concerns over the quality of life that their families experience while they are away. So – this bill fully funds the budget request for school construction and the family housing program. However, particularly now, as our debt continues to grow at a deplorable rate, we must rigorously review all activities that our government funds. Therefore, this bill does not include funding for ten military construction projects that lacked sufficient justification, reduces funding for six projects, and rescinds \$584 million in prior year funding.

I think this is a bill that we can be proud of and I urge you to support it.

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