



## U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

*PRESS RELEASE*

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### **HIGHLIGHTS OF FY 2009 MILITARY CONSTRUCTION/VA APPROPRIATIONS**

Washington, D.C... The FY 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill builds upon Congress' successful efforts over the past two years to bolster investments in veterans' health care priorities, including medical services, facilities, and cutting-edge research. The bill addresses shortcomings in the VA Health Care system by funding these areas substantially above the President's inadequate request, and by focusing on the unique needs of our troops returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

To ensure that the VA health care system makes available quality care to all veterans -- regardless of where they live -- the legislation funds a new initiative specifically geared to improve and expand VA health services in rural areas. The bill also provides additional resources to hire at least 1,100 new processors to reduce the amount of time veterans have to wait to have their benefit claims processed. Additionally, the legislation restores the Administration's proposed cuts to critical research which includes, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury, suicide prevention, and polytrauma.

#### **Overview**

- The bill totals \$72.865 billion in discretionary funding, \$3.52 billion above the President's budget request.
- \$2.84 billion of the increase is for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the majority of which will go toward veterans' health care and research.
- The bill includes \$41 billion for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) for medical care and research. This is \$1.8 billion above the President's budget request and includes additional funding for major new initiatives designed to improve care to the nation's veterans.
  - For the Medical Services account within VHA, the bill provides \$31 billion, \$1.2 billion above the President's budget request.
  - For the Medical Support and Compliance account, the bill provides \$4.45 billion, \$194 million above the President's budget request, for the administration of the health care system.

- For the Medical Facilities account within VHA, the bill provides \$5.03 billion, \$368 million above the President's budget request.

### **Department of Veterans Affairs**

The bill provides \$47.6 billion in discretionary funding for the VA, which is \$2.84 billion above the President's budget request.

#### **Veterans Affairs**

- \$250 million is included for the Secretary to launch a major new rural health initiative. The initiative will build upon the successes of the Office of Rural Health, by allowing the VA to expand initiatives such as telemedicine, mobile clinics, and to open new clinics in underserved and rural areas. Additionally, the bill includes \$200 million for fee-based services which will allow the VA to tap expertise in the public and private sector for health care that may not be readily available within VA medical centers.
- The bill also includes \$375 million for the VA to increase the income eligibility threshold for Priority 8 veterans. This will allow more veterans who do not have a service connected disability but make as little as \$28,430 a year to receive health care through the VA.
- Building upon last years initiative to increase the mileage reimbursement rate, the bill includes \$133 million to raise the reimbursement rate to at least 41.5 cents. Additionally, the bill freezes the deductible at the FY 2008 rate, thus the VA can not couple the increase in the mileage rate with an increase to veterans' deductibles.
- To address an increased need for next generation prosthetics and sensory aids, the bill includes an additional \$116 million for the VA's prosthetic program.
- The bill restores the \$38 million cut to medical research proposed by the Administration and provides an additional \$30 million above FY 2008 for the VA to continue cutting edge research into areas such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, suicide prevention, and polytrauma.
- The bill continues the investment in VA's infrastructure by providing an additional \$754 million to address VA's backlog of construction needs and an additional \$368 million to address maintenance deficiencies at existing VA hospitals and clinics.
- To continue the effort to reduce the amount of time veterans have to wait to have their benefit claims processed, the bill includes \$94 million above

the budget request for the VA to hire at least 1,100 additional claims processors.

- The bill also includes \$746 million above the President's budget request for costs associated with the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, which becomes effective on August 1, 2009.

### **Military Construction**

The bill provides a total of \$25.05 billion for military construction, approximately \$650 million above the President's budget request, and \$4.4 billion above the FY08 enacted level. The large increase in the budget request this year is due to BRAC-related construction and the Army and Marine Corps "Grow the Force" initiative.

- The bill provides \$10.8 billion for active duty military construction projects in the U.S. and overseas, an increase of \$332 million above the President's request.
- The bill provides \$1.35 billion for Guard and reserve military construction, an increase of \$422.8 million above the President's request.
- The bill includes \$8.765 billion for BRAC 2005.