



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

PRESS RELEASE

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Senate, House Conferees Approve FY 2006 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Spending Bill

WASHINGTON, DC – The Senate and House of Representatives conferees agreed tonight to approve the fiscal year 2006 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill. Total discretionary spending is \$44.14 billion. Highlights of the \$82.36 billion bill are below:

FY 2005 Appropriation: \$75.9 billion
President's FY 2006 Request: \$81.7 billion
Senate Passed: \$81.0 billion
Conference Agreement: \$82.36 billion

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION: \$6.2 billion, including:

- \$5.11 billion for Active Duty construction
- \$1.1 billion for Guard and Reserve construction

FAMILY HOUSING: \$4.019 billion, including:

- \$1.813 billion to fully fund family housing construction and construction improvements
- \$2.205 billion for operation and maintenance of existing units

The conference report funds Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) implementation at \$1.2 billion.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: Overall, the conference agreement recommends over \$70 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Of this amount, \$37.205 billion is for mandatory programs (benefits and compensation) and \$31.818 billion is for discretionary programs. There is an additional \$1.225 billion in emergency funding for medical services. The priorities reflected in the conference agreement show an increase for mental health for veterans, treatment of post traumatic stress disorder, and additional funding into Gulf War Illness research.

- Medical Services – \$22.5 billion is included for Medical Services. This level is \$3.2 billion over the FY05 level and \$575 million over the budget request. The conference agreement does not include the proposed fees included in the budget request.
- The agreement contains a new “Prosthetics and Integrative Health Care Initiative” to treat returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan who have lost limbs in combat.
- Construction – For construction programs, the bill recommends the budget request levels of \$607 million for major construction and \$199 million for minor construction. Of these funds, \$532 million of major construction and \$155 million of minor construction are designated for the “Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services” or CARES program.
- Other highlights include:
 - \$412 million for medical and prosthetic research (\$19 million over the budget request)
 - An additional \$40 million for VBA operation expenses to prevent staff reductions in processing disability claims benefits
 - \$85 million for state extended care facilities
 - Creates 3 “Centers of Excellence” for Mental Health/PTSD medical care
 - Requires VA to brief Congress on a quarterly basis on the status of their financial situation
 - Requires the VA to maintain the current system of processing home monitoring devices for diabetes patients
 - Fully funds all mental health care and PTSD requirements
 - Allows the VA to establish Assistance Secretary for Disaster Preparedness
 - The conference report provides \$412 million for Medical and prosthetic research, which is \$19 million over the fiscal year 2006 request
 - The agreement encourages the VA to provide full assistance to veterans in rural areas through information campaigns and distribution of VA benefits handbooks

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