



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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Senate Appropriations Committee Passes Fiscal Year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill Full Committee Markup

Washington, D.C... The Senate Appropriations Committee today approved the Fiscal Year 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, which offers substantial new investments in health care for America's veterans, including for the unique needs of our servicemen and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The legislation provides \$64.7 billion in discretionary funding, which is \$4 billion above the President's budget request.

The VA has consistently underestimated the resources necessary to meet the growing needs of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, resulting in dangerous budget shortfalls that have imperiled the availability of quality health care for all veterans, said Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. This Congress will not allow history to repeat itself. This funding bill provides the resources needed to improve and strengthen health care for our brave veterans, and wisely directs key investments to areas in the greatest need. I want to thank Chairman Tim Johnson and Acting Chairman Jack Reed for their leadership in this vital effort.

"Taking care of our veterans and military families is a top priority and this spending bill clearly reflects that," said Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), a former Army Ranger and Acting Chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. "If the Administration and others believe this bill invests too much in our veterans and troops, I think they are sorely mistaken. We have to meet our veterans' health care needs now and in the future, and this bill brings us closer to where we need to be to provide adequate care for all the veterans who need it. The bill will also boost military construction and help improve the quality of life for more of our military families."

Chairman Byrd and Senator Reed have been very helpful in this process and I thank them for that as we worked on this important funding measure, said Senator

Tim Johnson (D-SD), Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Subcommittee said. "It is our duty to those who have served our country to make sure the VA is robustly funded, and this bill addresses the needs of our veterans. In this time of war, we can not afford to slow military construction projects, and I am glad to see we have moved forward so swiftly on this bill. Our military's preparedness will certainly benefit from the committee's timely efforts, as well as our veterans."

The bill addresses key shortcomings in our veterans' health care system by: increasing critical investments in medical services, which include treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; funding new claims processors to address the VA's backlog, and investing in VA repair and maintenance needs to prevent a Walter Reed type situation in the VA system.

The Senate bill also addresses key quality of life needs for U.S. troops and their families. Military construction receives a significant funding boost, including for the Guard and Reserves, who are shouldering a significant burden of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The President's budget request severely underfunds most of the guard and reserve forces. The bill also fully funds BRAC and the President's "Grow the Force" initiative.

FY 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill **SUMMARY**

Total Discretionary Funding

2007 Enacted: \$49.8 billion (Excluding \$ 6.6 Billion in emergency supplemental funding)

President's Request: \$60.7 billion

Committee Mark: \$64.7 billion

Department of Veterans Affairs:

The VA faced catastrophic budget shortfalls in fiscal years 2005 and 2006, due in large part to the growing needs of veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the fiscal year 2007 supplemental funding bill, the Congress provided an additional \$1.8 billion for veterans' health care, veterans' benefits, and construction needs. This included \$1.3 billion targeted primarily to the unique health care needs of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to ensuring that VA facilities are maintained at the highest level. This Congress believes strongly that the needs of all veterans are paramount, and that the emerging needs of veterans of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan must be fully addressed in order to ensure ample resources needed for veterans of previous conflicts.

The Senate legislation includes \$43 billion for the VA, \$3.6 billion over President's request, and \$6.5 billion above FY 2007 level (excluding \$1.8 billion in emergency supplemental funding).

Veterans Health Administration: \$37.2 billion, \$2.6 billion over the President's request and \$4.5 billion (13.9%) over FY 2007 level (not including FY 2007 Supplemental). This includes funding for medical services, facilities, administration, and research.

- **Medical Services:** \$29 billion, \$1.8 billion above the President's budget request and \$3.5 billion above FY 2007 to improve access to medical services for all veterans. The additional funding for Medical Services provided in the Senate bill directs the VA to prioritize its emphasis on polytrauma care and mental health services, including the treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which has become an issue of major concern among returning Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, as well as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- **Medical Administration:** \$3.6 billion, \$200 million above the President's budget request and \$464 million (14.6%) above FY 2007 (excludes \$250 million in emergency supplemental funding).
- **Medical Facilities:** \$4.1 billion, \$500 million above the President's budget request and \$522 million (14.6%) above FY 2007 (excludes \$595 million in FY 2007 emergency supplemental funding).
- **Veterans Benefits Administration:** \$1.3 billion, \$131 million above the President's budget request. Includes \$131 million in additional funds for the VA to hire at least 500 additional claims processors to reduce the backlog of VA medical claims. This is in addition to \$61 million included for claims processors in the FY 2007 supplemental.
- **Minor Construction and Non-Recurring Maintenance:** Adds \$1 billion over the President's budget request for minor construction and non-recurring maintenance of VA hospitals and clinics. The purpose of this funding increase is to ensure that VA facilities do not experience the same type of deterioration experienced at Walter Reed.

Military Construction:

Excluding the carve out for base realignment and closure activities [BRAC] and for the President's "Grow the Force" initiative, the Administration's request for military construction remains consistent with, and, in some instances, significantly below, the level of funding in fiscal year 2007, particularly in the case

of the National Guard and Reserve. For example, the budget request for the Army National Guard is down 14.5 percent from the fiscal year 2007 appropriated amount. The Air National Guard request is down 32 percent, the Army Reserve is down 27.9 percent, and the Air Force Reserve reflects a 41 percent reduction. These reductions reflect a troubling multi-year downward trend in the Department's investment in infrastructure for the Reserve components.

The Senate legislation provides \$21.56 billion for military construction, approximately \$400 million above the President's request and \$8.8 billion above FY 2007 (excluding FY 2007 supplemental).

- **“Grow the Force” Initiative:** \$2.74 billion to support the Administration's proposal to increase the size of the Army by 65,000, the Marine Corps by 27,000, and the Guard and Reserve by 9,200 during the next five years. The bill requires GAO to study the adequacy of the Administration's planning and budgeting process for construction of housing and operational facilities to support this growth.
- **Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and Re-stationing Costs:** \$8.17 billion for BRAC 2005, fully funding the President's budget request, to implement base closures and realignments, as well as the re-stationing of 70,000 troops and their families from overseas bases to bases in the United States.
- **National Guard and Reserves:** \$929.8 million, \$234.7 million above the President's budget request. The National Guard and Reserve have been stretched to near breaking point with continual and extended deployments. Infrastructure requests to support Guard and Reserve training and readiness have been steadily declining. Without the support of Congress, the infrastructure so vital to the preparation of U.S. Guard and Reserve forces would be in failing condition. This legislation continues to invest in the Guard and Reserve and to ensure that they are prepared to answer the call to duty, whether here at home or on battlefields around the world.

All major construction projects funded through the military construction appropriations accounts are included in either the President's budget request or the Services' Future Years Defense Programs [FYDP] and are consistent with the criteria for additional funding for military construction projects in section 2856 of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1995 (Public Law 103-337).

Related Agencies: \$174 million, \$11 million above the President's budget request and \$25 million above FY 2007.

- **American Battle Monuments Commission:** \$56.6 million for military monuments and cemeteries.
- **U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims:** \$24.2 million to review appeals from veterans denied benefits.
- **Department of Defense, Civil, Cemeterial Expenses:** \$31.8 million for improvements to the safety and appearance of Arlington cemetery.
- **Armed Forces Retirement Home:** \$61.6 million for operation and maintenance of the Armed Forces Retirement Home