



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

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Senate Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee Clears Fiscal 2008 Funding Legislation

Washington, D.C... Today, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs approved legislation that marks a dramatic new commitment to America's veterans, our men and women in uniform, and their families. The bill provides a major boost to funding for the VA, including for the unique and growing health care needs of veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"This increase in funding is a major victory for our veterans, soldiers, and their families. The money in this bill will help address the health needs of our service members and allow the VA to accelerate its efforts to clear up the current backlog in the processing of benefits claims. The military construction funding will help the active duty and the Guard throughout the country," said Acting Chairman Jack Reed, D-RI, a former Army Ranger. "Chairman Johnson and I worked closely together on this bill every step of the way and he is a strong advocate for our nation's veterans and military personnel."

"As Chairman of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, I have discussed my priorities for this bill with Senator Reed and my staff, and emphasized the need to move forward with military construction projects in the interest of assuring the highest level of preparedness, especially during war time. Upgrading facilities and investing in our military bases ensures that our military is equipped to best defend the nation and enhances the quality of life for the brave men and women who serve. Providing health care to veterans is our responsibility as a grateful nation. This funding bill provides resources to improve the quality of life for service members across the country, and I want to thank both Chairman Byrd and Senator Reed for all of their assistance during this process," said Subcommittee Chairman Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD).

"America's veterans, many returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, deserve the best care and treatment available, without exception. The failure to prepare adequately for the impact of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to significant shortfalls at the VA, which have imperiled care across the country. It is our moral obligation to ensure America's veterans receive the excellent care

they deserve,+said Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va.

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

Subcommittee 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