

**Chairman John Boozman Opening Statement  
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs,  
and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to Review the FY2019 Budget Request for the U.S. Department of Veterans  
Affairs**

**May 9, 2018**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

The Subcommittee will come to order. Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here today to discuss the FY2019 and the FY2020 budget request for Department of Veterans Affairs.

As far as Federal domestic spending goes, this budget request makes the Department of Veterans Affairs a very comfortable place. With a \$6.6 billion or 8.3 percent funding increase for the Department, the budget request before us today is generous. I should note that this amount includes the \$2.4 billion budget amendment officially submitted by OMB. It does not, however, include additional funds that we understand may also be required for FY 2019. How the Department spends these funds is the real issue at hand, not the dollar amount. With the uncertainty over the amounts in the budget request and all the other changes at VA, it is more important than ever to hear from those in charge of the VA's major component administrations about how they plan to effectively and efficiently use the resources they are asking for. I want to hear from you today how VA plans to improve cost estimates, manage spending more prudently, and be more transparent with Congress.

This hearing comes at an opportune time, as Congress continues to wrestle with the question of how to address the additional needs this year in community care discretionary spending and Veterans Choice Program mandatory spending. Progress is being made over on the authorizing side on this problem as we speak – efforts I will be involved in through my membership on the Senate VA Committee, but we are dangerously close to depleting the Choice account and I want to hear from you today how we can help you avoid situations where you don't have the funds needed to provide the care veterans expect.

Additionally, we look forward to hearing about the status of the electronic health record system; the progress made to reduce incidents of veterans suicide and the over prescription of opioids; your efforts to address the appeals backlog by modernizing the disability claims appeals process; and also how we can help the VA increase access to care through increasing internal VA care and improving care in the community. This, coupled with your efforts to increase telemedicine, is

especially important for our rural veterans. These are all issues this Subcommittee continues to care deeply about.

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