

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

**Hearing to Review the FY2018 and FY2019 Budget Requests
for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

June 21, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome to our seventh subcommittee hearing of 2017. The subcommittee will come to order. Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here today to discuss the FY2018 and the FY2019 budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

As far as federal domestic spending goes, in this year's budget cycle, the Department of Veterans Affairs is in a comfortable place. With a \$4.4 billion or 6 percent funding increase for the department, the budget request before us today is generous. I have always believed, however, that the department's stewardship of those funds, rather than the dollar amount, is the real issue at hand.

I want to hear from you today about how the VA plans to improve cost estimating, manage spending more prudently and be more transparent with Congress. Most of us are aware there is a question before this subcommittee and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee – also responsible for oversight of the department – about additional needs this year and next year in community care discretionary spending and the Veterans Choice Program mandatory spending.

I know progress is being made over on the authorizing side on this problem as we speak. I support these efforts, but 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.

I hope today's hearing will cover all aspects of VA, and I urge my colleagues to leave no stone unturned. We look forward to hearing about the very recent decision on the electronic health record system – a decision, Mr. Secretary, I commend you for making – your plans to decrease veterans suicide and protect veterans from the over prescription of opioids; how we can help you increase access to care – through increasing internal VA care and improving care in the community – especially for our rural veterans coupled with your efforts to increase telemedicine – issues this subcommittee cares very deeply about; and your efforts to address the appeals backlog by modernizing the disability claims appeals process.

As you I've mentioned to you before, at our last hearing with you, Mr. Secretary, and in our personal conversations, I hope you take the opportunity today to talk about the needs and constraints you have financially as well as the needs and constraints you have statutorily. Your openness today will help us know how to best help you.

I'd like to introduce our panel:

- A welcome back to the Secretary – the Honorable David J. Shulkin, MD, is the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. He is accompanied by:
- Poonam L. Alaigh, M.D., the Acting Under Secretary for Health at the Veterans Health Administration;
- Mr. Thomas J. Murphy, the Acting Under Secretary for Benefits at the Veterans Benefits Administration; and
- Mr. Ronald E. Walters, the Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs at the National Cemetery Administration. Welcome to all of you.

I note there are quite a few other VA experts seated behind the panel who are present today to support this hearing, and I thank you for being here.

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