



U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations

Thad Cochran of Mississippi, Chairman

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COMMITTEE ADVANCES FY2016 MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Legislation Supports New Military Construction, Increases VA Funding and Oversight; Will Head to Full Senate for Consideration

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Senate Committee on Appropriations today approved the FY2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (MilCon-VA) Appropriations Bill, which provides resources for veterans' benefits and programs and makes funding available to equip and house military personnel.

The bill, which is now available for Senate consideration, totals \$77.6 billion in discretionary funding, \$5.5 billion above the FY2015 level and \$1.2 billion below the President's budget request.

Military construction is funded at more than \$8.0 billion, an increase of \$1.5 billion over the FY2015 enacted level. This funding allows for full funding of family housing, military family support services, hospital and health facilities construction, and important overseas investments.

The bill also contains \$163.8 billion in discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to support American veterans and their families. This funding represents a 6.5 percent increase over FY2015 enacted levels to provide for health care, benefit claims processing, medical and prosthetic research, information technology, and the VA National Cemeteries.

"This bill continues our long, bipartisan tradition of full support for our active duty military, our veterans, and their families. We've made a concerted effort to provide significant new resources to give the Department of Veterans Affairs every chance to improve its performance and improve delivery of health care, benefits and services to our nation's veterans. The bill increases funding for veterans in the areas where they need it the most—health care, benefit claims processing, medical research and technology upgrades. Additionally, the bill includes necessary and vital new oversight measures, such as whistleblower protections and new construction reforms, to help ensure that the VA uses taxpayer resources much more wisely and effectively," said **U.S. Senator Thad Cochran**, chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations. "I commend Senator Kirk, as well as Senator Tester, for their work on this important legislation, and I look forward to its consideration before the Senate."

Highlights of the Senate FY2016 MilCon-VA Appropriations Bill:

The FY2016 MilCon-VA Appropriations Bill totals \$77.6 billion, \$5.5 billion and 7.7 percent above the FY2015 level and \$1.2 billion below the President's budget request.

Military Construction – \$8.083 billion is provided for military construction projects, \$1.5 billion above the enacted FY2015 level and \$355 million below the President's request. This includes funds for construction and renovation projects to ensure training capabilities and quality of life on military bases within the United States and around the globe.

- **Missile Defense** – \$220.4 million provided to fully fund construction of the second Aegis Ashore missile defense site in Redzikowo, Poland.
- **Military Family Housing** – \$1.4 billion to fund construction, operation and maintenance of military family housing for FY2016, \$223 million above the FY2015 level and the same as the budget request. These resources will continue to provide quality housing for the nearly 1.4 million military families currently served by the program.
- **Military Medical Facilities** – \$678 million for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities, an increase of \$192 million above the FY2015 enacted level. This funding will allow for continued support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including our wounded troops abroad.
- **Department of Defense (DOD) Education Facilities** – \$334 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at 10 DOD school facilities located within the United States and overseas.
- **Guard and Reserve** – \$551 million to support the construction needs of the Guard and Reserve, \$124 million above the FY2015 enacted level.
- **NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP)** – \$120 million for infrastructure to meet wartime, crisis, peace support and deterrence operations, and training requirements. The funds will support responses to international threats and challenges originating, for example, from Russia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Veterans Affairs (VA) – The legislation includes a record level of \$163.8 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, an increase of \$4.6 billion above the FY2015 level. These resources will support provide the services and care earned by veterans through their dedicated service to their nation.

Discretionary funding for VA programs totals \$69.2 billion. As requested by the administration, the bill makes an additional \$1.1 billion in FY2016 available to improve patient access to care, and to support additional health care services including hepatitis C treatments, veterans' caregiver services, and homeless veterans' assistance.

- **VA Medical Services** – \$48.7 billion to support treatment and care for approximately 6.9 million patients in FY2016. The bill outlines: \$900 million for groundbreaking new hepatitis C treatments; \$622 million for medical research; \$446 million for health care specifically for women veterans; \$4.9 billion to care for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; \$232 million for traumatic brain injury treatment; and \$270 million for rural health initiatives.
- **VA Electronic Health Record** – \$233 million for continued modernization of the VA electronic health record system. The bill includes language restricting the use of this

funding until the VA demonstrates functional improvements in the interoperability of a system to seamlessly exchange veterans' medical data among the VA, DOD and the private sector.

- **Disability Claims Processing Backlog** – \$290 million for the paperless claims processing system, \$141 million for digital scanning of health records, and \$26 million for centralized mail. To prompt greater national and regional progress in reducing VA claims backlogs, the bill maintains strict reporting requirements.
- **Construction** – Nearly \$1.4 billion for major and minor construction associated with VA hospital replacement and continued correction of seismic safety issues and deficiencies.
- **Construction Oversight** – The bill prohibits the VA from embarking on major medical facility construction until it enters into an agreement designating the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as the design and construction agent to manage VA major construction projects.
- **VA Mandatory Funding** – The bill fulfills mandatory funding requirements such as: veteran disability compensation programs for 4.7 million veterans and their survivors; education benefits for nearly 1.2 million veterans; guaranteed home loans for 431,000 veterans; and vocational rehabilitation and employment training for more than 137,000 veterans.
- **Advance Appropriations** – \$63.3 billion in advance FY2017 funding for veterans' medical programs, the same level as the President's request, to support VA medical services, medical support and compliance, medical facilities, and full access to medical care needs for veterans. Adopting a budget request recommendation, the bill for the first time also includes \$104 billion in advance funding for VA mandatory benefit programs.

Arlington National Cemetery – \$71 million for the Arlington National Cemetery, an increase of \$5 million from the FY2015 enacted level.

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