

# *House Appropriations Committee*

*Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen*

Website address: <http://appropriations.house.gov/>

## **Fiscal Year 2018 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Legislation**

*Bill will continue the rebuilding of our national security and provide needed resources for our troops, veterans, and military families*

The fiscal year 2018 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill meets the goals outlined by the White House to rebuild the military, providing funding to house, train, and equip military personnel, provide housing and services to military families, and help maintain base infrastructure. The bill also provides robust funding for veterans' benefits and programs.

In total, the legislation provides \$92 billion in discretionary funding – \$9.6 billion above the fiscal year 2017 enacted level – an additional \$750 million in Overseas Contingency Operations funding – \$330 million over fiscal year 2017 – which includes funding for European Deterrence/Reassurance Initiative projects.

Within this total, funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is increased by \$7.1 billion – 9.5 percent – over the fiscal year 2017 level, including funding to increase access to services for veterans, and to increase oversight and accountability within the department. This includes the advance funding provided for veterans in the fiscal year 2017 enacted appropriations bill. This is the largest dollar amount ever provided to the VA.

Military construction is increased by \$2.4 billion – 31 percent over the fiscal year 2017 level – to provide the necessary resources to continue to rebuild our military, to prepare our service members to face existing and emerging threats, and to care for military families.

**Oversight and Accountability** – The legislation strengthens oversight and accountability at the Departments of Defense (DOD) and VA to ensure taxpayer dollars are being used fully to benefit our service members and our veterans. Several provisions are included to keep these agencies on track and to address problems that have wasted money and hurt critical services.

Some of these oversight provisions include: requiring rigorous reporting on the status of VA claims processing, requiring large construction projects to be managed outside of the VA, limiting transfers between construction projects, limiting changes in the scope of construction projects, restricting certain spending actions without notification to Congress, and requiring quarterly progress reports on the electronic health record contract.

The bill also includes funding for new oversight offices in VA, as requested, to protect whistleblowers and provide increased accountability through investigation of poorly performing managers and instances of inferior patient care. These offices will support the Secretary's new authority to fire or demote poorly performing employees and to recoup pay, benefits, and awards in cases of malfeasance.

**Military Construction** – The bill provides a total of \$10.1 billion for military construction projects – an increase of \$2.4 billion, or 31 percent, above the enacted fiscal year 2017 level. In addition to this amount, \$750 million is provided in OCO funding for projects in countries with ongoing U.S. operations. These funds will provide for the construction of facilities to enable our military to fight current and emerging threats, to support increased troop levels, and to sustain services for military families. This includes operational facilities, training facilities, hospitals, family housing, National Guard readiness centers, barracks, and other important resources. In total, 203 military construction projects across the country and overseas receive funding in the bill.

- **Military Family Housing** – The bill provides \$1.4 billion to fund construction, operation, and maintenance of military family housing for fiscal year 2018. This is \$133 million above the fiscal year 2017 level and \$2 million above the budget request. The funding will ensure quality housing is sustained for all 1,388,028 military families currently served by the program.
- **Military Medical Facilities** – The bill includes \$708 million for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities, an increase of \$404 million above the fiscal year 2017 level. This funding will allow for continued support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including our wounded troops abroad.
- **DOD Education Facilities** – The bill includes \$250 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at four DOD Education Activities facilities located within the U.S. and overseas.
- **Guard and Reserve** – The bill includes \$645 million for construction or alteration of Guard and Reserve facilities in 26 states and territories, \$450 million above the requested level.
- **NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP)** – The bill provides \$178 million, the same level as the fiscal year 2017 funding level, for infrastructure necessary for wartime, crisis, and peace support and deterrence operations, and training requirements. The funds will support responses to the challenges posed by Russia and to the risks and threats emanating from the Middle East and North Africa.
- **Guantanamo Bay** – The legislation continues language to prohibit the closure of the Guantanamo Bay Naval Station and a provision to prohibit funding for any facility within the U.S. to house detainees. The bill also includes \$115 million in funding to build two new barracks to house service members stationed at Guantanamo Bay.

**Veterans Affairs (VA)** – The legislation includes a total of \$185.4 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding for the VA, an increase of \$8.5 billion above the fiscal year 2017 level. This funding will help address many of the problems currently facing the VA, and provide for better and increased access to care for our veterans.

Discretionary funding alone for VA programs in the bill totals \$81.5 billion, an increase of \$7.1 billion above the fiscal year 2017 level. Approximately \$66.4 billion of this discretionary total was provided last year via advance funding in the fiscal year 2017 Appropriations bill.

These additional funds will provide resources for important priorities within the VA, such as health care access, suicide prevention outreach, claims processing, homeless prevention and care, opioid addiction, rural health and medical research.

**VA Medical Care** – The bill funds VA medical care at \$68.8 billion – providing for approximately seven million patients to be treated in fiscal year 2018. Within this total, funding includes: \$8.4 billion in mental health care services; \$196 million in suicide prevention outreach activities; \$316 million for traumatic brain injury treatment; \$7.3 billion in homeless veterans treatment, services, housing, and job training; \$751 million for hepatitis C treatment; \$386 million for opioid abuse prevention; and \$270 million in rural health initiatives.

- **VA Electronic Health Record** – The bill contains \$782 million for the new VA electronic health record system. This will ensure the implementation of the contract creating an electronic record system for VA that is identical to one being developed for DOD. These two identical systems will ensure our veterans get proper care, with timely and accurate medical data transferred between the VA, DOD, and the private sector.
- **Disability Claims Processing Backlog** – Reducing the disability claims backlog is essential to ensuring adequate compensation and care for the almost 500,000 veterans still wading through the VA bureaucracy to get a final decision on their claims. The bill will help speed this process and get these veterans the decisions they are awaiting by providing \$54 million above the 2017 level, and \$5 million above the request for the Board of Veterans Appeals to be used for hiring additional claims and appellate staff, digital scanning of health records, and overtime pay. In addition, the bill continues rigorous reporting requirements to track each regional office's performance on claims processing and appeals backlogs.
- **Construction** – Major and minor construction within the VA is funded at \$855 million. In addition, \$2 billion is provided for infrastructure repair, with the funding allocated to minor construction, non-recurring maintenance, and grants for state retirement homes for veterans. With this additional funding, the backlog in state home construction applications will be eliminated.
- **VA Mandatory Funding** – The bill fulfills mandatory funding requirements such as: veteran disability compensation programs for more than five million veterans and their survivors; education benefits for one million veterans; and vocational rehabilitation and employment training for more than 100,000 veterans.

- **Advance Appropriations** – The bill contains \$71 billion in advance fiscal year 2019 funding for veterans’ medical programs – the same level as the President’s request. This funding will provide for medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities, and ensure that our veterans have continued, full access to their medical care needs. The bill includes \$108 billion in advance funding for VA mandatory benefit programs, as requested in the President's budget.

**Arlington National Cemetery** – The bill includes an additional \$177 million for new security requirements and planning, design, and construction of the Southern Expansion at the Cemetery, for a total of \$248 million.

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