



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen
House Committee on Appropriations

**Appropriations Subcommittee Mark-up
FY 2019 Military Construction-VA
April 26, 2018**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman (Dent), for the time.

Today, the House continues its appropriations process with the first subcommittee mark-up of the FY 2019 cycle. And once again, it is the Military Construction-VA subcommittee that leads the way!

This is only fitting because our most important responsibility as Members of Congress is to provide for the common defense and it is the men and women of our Armed Services, their families, and our veterans who form the foundation of our national security.

On their behalf, the proposal before us makes investments to address many challenges at the Veterans Administration – increasing efficiency, cutting red tape, and providing strong oversight of spending so that these precious taxpayer dollars are used wisely and not wasted on mismanagement and bureaucratic delay.

I am pleased that this legislation addresses the VA benefit appeals backlog and provides funding for veterans' homeless assistance – two pressing issues for my fellow veterans back in my home state of New Jersey.

The bill also provides funds so the members of our Armed Forces, and their families, have the facilities and services that they need to complete their missions at home and abroad.

This bill is being considered at an especially critical time for both the military and the VA.

Assisted by the two year “caps” agreement, we are rebuilding our Armed Forces and that important effort is supported by funding in this legislation.

However, on the VA side I am concerned about a vacuum of leadership. On the pages of the Washington Post we read that “Veterans Affairs as an institution is bleeding out.” In many respects, that is true.

And now is not the time for a protracted nomination and confirmation saga. There’s too much at stake.

For example, we need to know with certainty the Administration’s position on VA Choice.

And then there’s the “slow-motion” disaster known as Electronic Medical Records. The bill before us provides another \$1.2 billion for a project that should have been completed years ago.

So the VA desperately needs leadership and needs it now.

Mr. Chairman, in coming weeks, we will continue our oversight and funding process. It is our intention to move as expeditiously as possible to complete all 12 of the fiscal year ‘19 Appropriations bills.

After all, the “power of the purse” lies in this building - it is the Constitutional duty of Congress to make spending decisions on behalf of the people we represent at home.

I commend you, Mr. Chairman (Dent), the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, our full Committee Ranking Member, Ms. Lowey, all the members of the Subcommittee and the professional staff - on both sides of the aisle - who have worked so hard to make this mark-up possible.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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