



# Chairman Charlie Dent

*Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs  
House Committee on Appropriations*

---

**Subcommittee Markup  
Fiscal Year 2016 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies  
Appropriations Bill  
April 15, 2015  
Opening Statement As Prepared**

---

The Subcommittee will come to order. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Valadao back to the Subcommittee; we are very glad to have you.

Today, we consider fiscal year 2016 funding for the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies. I greatly appreciate the participation and support of our Subcommittee members, both sides of the aisle, as we considered priorities and funding levels for the important programs in our bill. We analyzed the budget request, developed a lot of questions, held five oversight hearings to hear directly from members of all the Services, the Department of Defense leadership, the Secretary of the VA, the VA Inspector General, and the Directors of our four Related Agencies. We received over 700 requests from members; again, from both sides of the aisle, and gave full consideration to each one. It has been a busy spring.

As we consider this bill, I can't proceed further without noting that this Subcommittee has an incredible level of support from the Chair and Ranking Member of the Full Committee. Chairman Rogers, Mrs. Lowey—on behalf of the Subcommittee, let me tell you how meaningful your attention, oversight and genuine care for the military and veterans is. I need to also state my appreciation for the fine work of the Subcommittee Ranking Member, Mr. Bishop. The gentleman from Georgia is knowledgeable, engaged, and determined to maintain diligent oversight -- all with a smile. This is my first time as the Chairman of this Subcommittee, and I feel very privileged to serve beside him.

We have some great staff helping us as well: Matt Washington, Sue Quantius, Sarah Young, Tracey Russell and Maureen Holohan on the Committee staff, and Sean Snyder on my personal staff. We couldn't do it without them.

This legislation demonstrates our firm commitment to fully supporting the nation's veterans and servicemembers. Our investment of nearly \$77 billion for Military Construction and VA, 6 percent over last year's level, is unprecedented.

This bill provides comprehensive support for servicemembers, military families, and veterans. It supports our troops with the facilities and services necessary to maintain readiness and morale at bases here in the states and around the world. It provides for Defense Department schools and health clinics that take care of military families.

And the bill funds our veteran healthcare systems to ensure that our promise to care for those who have sacrificed in defense of this great nation continues as those men and women return home. We owe this to our vets and are committed to sustained oversight so that programs

deliver what they promise, and taxpayers are well served by the investments we make.

The bill provides a total of \$7.6 billion for military construction project and family housing, including base and Overseas Contingency Operations funding – an increase of \$904 million above the enacted fiscal year 2015 level, and \$755 million below the President’s request.

This funding meets DOD’s most critical needs, including priority projects for the Combatant Commanders in the EUCOM, CENTCOM, AFRICOM and PACOM. It provides \$607 million for Military Medical Facilities. It provides \$334 million for Department of Defense Education Facilities, for construction or renovation of ten schools. It supports our Guard and Reserve through \$512 million for facilities in 28 states. It fully funds Military Family Housing at \$1.4 billion. And it provides \$150 million for the NATO Security Investment Program, which is \$30 million over the budget request.

The legislation includes a total of \$163.2 billion in combined discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Discretionary funding alone for Veterans programs in the bill is \$68.7 billion. Total fiscal year 2016 discretionary funding is \$3.6 billion above fiscal year 2015 and \$1.4 billion below the budget request. \$3 billion of this increase was advance funded.

The bill funds VA medical services at \$48.6 billion. That includes \$970 million that VA came back and asked for, on top of the advanced funding from last year. We stretched pretty far to do this—we haven’t funded this “second bite” in House action before. It is tough to find \$970 million in any budget environment, but this Committee did—showing, again, the level of bipartisan commitment we have to our veterans.

For Disability Claims, we provide the full request for the Veterans Benefits Administration, which is a \$163 million increase over fiscal year 2015, and the full request for the Board of Veterans appeals.

The bill will enhance transparency and accountability at the VA through further oversight and an increase for the VA Office of Inspector General’s independent audits and investigations

This legislation also contains \$233 million for the modernization of the VA Electronic Health Record and includes language restricting funding until the VA demonstrates progress on the system’s functionality and interoperability.

On Construction issues, major construction within the VA is funded at \$562 million, which is the same level as fiscal year 2015. The bill provides funding for hospital replacement and allows the VA to continue to correct seismic safety issues and deficiencies. We did not fund the more-than-double budget request for construction as we face the impact of gross mismanagement of the Colorado VA Hospital Construction, which resulted in a \$930 million cost overrun. We have also cracked down on oversight.

In closing: This is a very solid, bipartisan bill that is focused on the needs of servicemembers, veterans and all their families. We are \$4.6 billion over the fiscal year 2015 level; nearly 6 percent. We have provided for our military and veterans to the very best level we can. Did we fund every last dime requested? No.

Not every idea has merit—not every project is mission critical. We did not fund some projects, we cut some requested increases, and we rescinded funds. These were fair decisions and part of our responsibility as appropriators.

I urge you to support the bill. Support for this bill is a vote of support for our service members, our military families, and the over 48 million individuals served by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I would now like to turn to Mr. Bishop, our distinguished Ranking Member, for his statement.

#####