

Chairman Hal Rogers
House Committee on Appropriations
Full Committee Mark Up
Fiscal Year 2014 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill
May 21, 2013
Opening Statement As Prepared

I'd like to start by thanking Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Bishop for their hard work in crafting this bill. It is a model of bipartisan teamwork that addresses the most urgent needs of our Defense and our nation's veterans.

Specifically, this bill funds critical Department of Defense infrastructure, like hospitals, schools, and family housing. It fulfills our duty to our brave servicemen and women that they have an acceptable quality of life during their service and when they return home, providing our veterans with medical care, job training and education, and other benefits they have earned as a result of their sacrifice.

I'm very pleased that this bill addresses some of the greatest deficiencies at the Department of Veterans Affairs. We provided funding to deal with the shameful disability claims processing backlog and to help ensure that claims don't pile up like this again. We also included funding and legislative language for a single, integrated DoD and VA electronic health record system.

It's an absolute embarrassment that we are 13 years into the 21st century, and our military hasn't yet developed a seamless method to provide critical health care to our veterans. This funding will jumpstart this effort, giving our nation's warfighters the level of care they deserve.

However, as we discussed earlier, it's not the easiest of budget times. Most of the funding in this bill is exempt from sequestration, but we can't in good conscious let a single dollar in this bill be spent unnecessarily. Chairman Culberson and his subcommittee carefully assessed every nickel and dime this legislation appropriates, and took the difficult but responsible steps to cut excess spending and rescind unobligated balances.

We also included stringent safeguards to ensure that none of this funding will go to waste. This oversight includes reporting requirements, and restrictions on certain transfers and project changes.

I believe this is a bill that our entire Committee can and should support. It is comprehensive, bipartisan legislation that adequately supports our troops and veterans, but stays within the boundaries of fiscal responsibility. I urge my colleagues to report this bill to the House.

#####