



Chuck Konigsberg <chuck.konigsberg@gmail.com>

NEWS: FY2019 MilCon-VA Appropriations Bill Approved by Senate Committee

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To: "Taylor, Blair (Shelby)" <Blair_Taylor@shelby.senate.gov>



RICHARD SHELBY OF ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN

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CONTACT:

[Blair Taylor](#)

FY2019 MILCON-VA APPROPRIATIONS BILL APPROVED BY COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Senate Committee on Appropriations today approved the **FY2019 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies (MilCon-VA) Appropriations Bill**, providing support for critical housing, infrastructure, and facilities for U.S. military forces and their families, as well as increased funding for veterans’ health care and benefits.

Approved on a bipartisan vote of 31-0, the measure includes \$97.1 billion in FY2019 discretionary funding, \$5.1 billion above the FY2018 level. The bill provides critical funding for construction of national defense facilities, family housing, and military hospitals and schools. The bill also provides funding for veterans’ health care, veterans’ benefits, medical and prosthetic research, the National Cemetery Administration, information technology, and the VA Inspector General.

“This bill supports investments that will ensure maximum readiness and warfighting capability for our troops, while also providing funding for needed improvements and innovations at the VA,” said **Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Richard Shelby (R-Ala.)**. “I appreciate the dedicated work done by Senators Boozman and Schatz to put forward this important, balanced legislation.”

“Keeping the promise we made to our veterans is an important responsibility of the federal government. Just as essential is that we ensure our military has the infrastructure it needs to defend our nation and its allies. This bill reflects these priorities by increasing resources to prevent veteran suicide, increasing rural access to healthcare, supporting critical mental health programs, preventing veterans homelessness and providing robust funding for innovative medical research. Our bill will also give the Department of Defense the resources it needs to project power globally, enhance our warfighting capabilities and train our servicemembers,” **said U.S. Senator John Boozman (R-Ark.)**, chairman of the MilCon-VA Appropriations Subcommittee.

Bill Highlights:

Military Construction – \$10.3 billion to fund 169 military construction projects, which is \$228 million above the FY2018 level. This includes funds for construction and renovation projects on military bases within the United States and around the globe.

- **European Reassurance Initiative** – \$792 million to fund construction projects in support of U.S. allies through the European Reassurance Initiative.
- **Overseas Contingency Operations** – \$129 million for construction projects in direct support of military operations in the Middle East.

- **Military Family Housing** – \$1.6 billion for construction, operation and maintenance of military family housing, which is \$173 million above the FY2018 level. The bill includes construction funding for nine family housing projects.
- **Military Medical Facilities** – \$366 million for construction or alteration of military medical facilities. This funding will allow for continued support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including wounded U.S. troops abroad.
- **Department of Defense Education Facilities** – \$388 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at four overseas military schools.
- **Guard and Reserve** – \$487 million to support the construction needs of National Guard and Reserve forces.
- **NATO Security Investment Program** – \$171 million to provide infrastructure for training, deterrence, and the NATO Alliance’s response to challenges posed by Russia and threats from the Middle East and North Africa.

Veterans Affairs (VA) – The legislation includes a record level of \$86.4 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, an increase of \$5 billion above the FY2018 level. These resources will provide the healthcare, benefits, and memorial services earned by U.S. service members and veterans.

- **VA Medical Care** – \$78.3 billion to support medical treatment and healthcare for approximately 9.3 million enrolled patients in FY2019. The bill includes: \$8.6 billion for mental health; \$860.8 million for the Caregivers Program; \$400 million for opioid misuse prevention and treatment; \$779 million for medical and prosthetic research; \$525 million for health care specifically for women veterans; and \$270 million for rural health initiatives.

- **Veterans Homelessness** – \$1.8 billion for VA Homelessness programs. The bill includes \$450 million for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families program.
- **Claims Processing** – \$3 billion, which is \$87 million above the president’s request, to ensure that proper staffing and resources are utilized to reduce the wait time and backlog of disability decisions on appeal, and to meet the demand for other benefit programs.
- **Construction** – \$1.8 billion for major and minor construction associated with VA hospital replacement, correction of seismic deficiencies, scores of projects to improve access to VA health care, and the VA’s National Cemeteries. The bill also includes \$150 million in construction grants for State Extended Care Facilities.

- **VA Mandatory Funding** – The bill fulfills mandatory funding requirements, including veteran disability compensation programs for 4.9 million veterans and 432,000 survivors; education benefits for nearly one million veterans; guaranteed home loans for 519,000 veterans; and vocational rehabilitation and employment training for more than 149,000 veterans.
- **Advance Appropriations** – \$75.6 billion in FY2020 advance discretionary funding for veterans health care, and \$121.3 billion in FY2020 advance mandatory funding for veterans benefits.

Related Agencies – The legislation also includes \$317.7 million in funding for:

- **American Battle Monuments Commission** – \$81 million
- **U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims** – \$35 million
- **Arlington National Cemetery** – \$137.4 million

- **Armed Forces Retirement Home** – \$64.3 million

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