



COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

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SUMMARY: 2009 MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill sends a clear message to America's servicemen and women, their families, and our veterans that we all appreciate and respect their service and sacrifice.

It builds upon the efforts of the last two years, as this Congress has made veterans the #1 priority. In 2007, Congress passed 3 separate appropriations bills that increased total funding for Veterans medical care by \$11.8 billion, so that they may receive the quality of care that they deserve. The emergency supplemental passed by Congress in June continued those efforts with further increases for VA medical care and rewarding those who serve by expanding the GI bill to provide a full, four-year college benefit to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

This year's bill builds on those accomplishments. It addresses the critical needs facing veterans medical care as soldiers return from Iraq and Afghanistan by:

- Increasing enrollment of Priority 8 veterans, ensuring that we keep our commitment to all veterans,
- Adding roughly 2,000 additional claims processors to work down the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims,
- Providing veterans with advanced prosthetics,
- Making substantial increases to mental health and substance abuse,
- Providing additional resources for veterans who live where the Department does not offer sufficient medical services,
- Increasing the gas mileage reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents per mile and freezing the deductible for veterans traveling long distances for care.

For active duty service members and their families, the bill provides \$233 million above the President's request for quality of life projects that will directly improve living conditions and health care delivery.

Bill Total

2008 Enacted: \$63.9 billion

President's Request: \$69.3 billion

Final Bill: \$72.9 billion

KEY INVESTMENTS

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS: \$47.6 billion, \$4.5 billion above 2008 and \$2.8 billion over the President's request, for veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA): \$41 billion, \$1.8 billion above the President's request and \$4.1 billion above 2008, for veterans medical care. The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 5.8 million patients in 2009 including more than 333,275 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (40,000 more than 2008).

- **Medical Services:** \$30.97 billion, \$1.2 billion above the President's request and \$2.9 billion above 2008, to improve access to medical services for all veterans.
 - **Enrollment of Priority 8 Veterans:** \$375 million, not requested by the President, to start enrolling additional Priority 8 veterans. An estimated one half of all uninsured veterans are Priority 8. Priority 8 veterans have not been enrolled since 2003 as part of an Administration effort to cut costs.
 - **Mental Health and Substance Abuse:** \$3.8 billion for specialty mental health care and \$584 million for substance abuse programs.
 - **Fee-Based Care:** \$200 million, not requested by the President and not funded in 2008, for fee-based services to improve access to care where VHA facilities are not available.
 - **Rural Health Initiative:** \$250 million to improve access to medical care for veterans in rural areas.
 - **Patient Travel Reimbursements:** \$133 million above the President's request to increase the travel reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile, while freezing the deductible.
 - **Assistance for Homeless Vets:** \$130 million for the homeless grants and per diem program, rejecting the President's \$8 million cut and the same as 2008, in addition to \$30 million to hire additional personnel for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program.
 - **New Generation Prosthetics:** \$1.6 billion, \$250 million above 2008 and \$116 million above the President's request, to provide veterans with appropriate prosthetic support and sensory aids.

- **Medical Support and Compliance:** \$4.5 billion, \$194 million above the President's request and \$388 million above 2008, to ensure the efficient operation of the Department's health care system and to support plans to increase enrollment of Priority 8 veterans.

- **Medical Facilities:** \$5 billion, \$368 million above the President's request and \$769 million above 2008, including a \$300 million increase for on-going maintenance and renovations of existing facilities to address identified shortfalls and to ensure the Department's facilities remain capable of delivering world class medicine. The Department currently estimates a maintenance backlog of over \$5 billion.

- **Medical and Prosthetic Research:** \$510 million, rejecting the President's \$38 million cut and \$30 million above 2008, for research to help improve the quality of life for injured and aging veterans. Rejects cuts to trauma and mental health research – important to veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Major and Minor Construction: \$1.7 billion, \$754 million above the President's request, to fund recommendations made by the Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission, which was established to look at facilities and determine their construction needs. The increase in minor construction will enable the Department to complete over 100 projects in 2009.

Extended Care Facilities: \$175 million, rejecting the President's \$80 million cut and \$10 million above 2008, for grants to states for construction and renovation of extended care facilities.

General Operating Expenses: \$1.8 billion, \$102 million above the President's request and \$197 million above 2008, to enable the Department to hire roughly 2,000 additional claims processors to work down the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims. The most recent VA quarterly status report estimates that nearly 396,000 claims are pending which is 20,000 more than their goal. Public Law 110-252 provided \$100 million for implementation of the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008" that was not included in this comparison.

Information Technology: \$2.5 billion, \$229 million above 2008 and \$47 million above the President's request, including \$35 million for an emergency fund to address critical unplanned needs at medical facilities.

Inspector General: \$87.8 million, rejecting the President's \$4 million cut and \$7.3 million above 2008, to provide additional oversight personnel.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION: \$25 billion, \$649 million above the President's request and \$4.4 billion above 2008. The large increase is mostly due to the costs of implementing Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and plans to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps.

Quality of Life Initiative: \$233 million, not requested by the President, to continue a quality of life initiative for troops and their families started in the 2008 supplemental including: \$122 million for three new trainee and recruit housing facilities for the Army and Marine Corps to improve the barracks soldiers and marines live in when they train; and \$111 million for medical military construction and planning activities to upgrade substandard medical treatment facilities. For years, service members and their families have said that quality of life issues are their top priority, but they have been neglected by this Administration.

2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and Re-stationing: \$8.8 billion, \$667 million above 2008, to implement base closures and realignments, and support the re-stationing of 70,000 troops and their families from overseas to the United States. The bill also funds planning for the eventual relocation of 8,000 marines and 9,000 dependents from Okinawa to Guam.

Growing the Force: \$5.5 billion in military construction and family housing, to support the Administration's program to increase the size of the Army by 65,000, the Marine Corps by 27,000, and the Guard and Reserve by 9,200 personnel.

BRAC 1990: \$458 million, \$163 million above 2008 and \$65 million above the President's request, to address an estimated \$3.5 billion backlog in needed environmental cleanup for bases that were closed during the four previous BRAC rounds as identified in most recent [Defense Environmental Programs Annual Report](#).

Military Housing: \$3.2 billion, \$292 million above 2008, to further eliminate inadequate military housing.

RELATED AGENCIES

American Battle Monuments Commission: \$59.5 million, \$15 million above 2008 and \$12 million above the President's request. This funding provides for the care and operation of our military monuments and cemeteries around the world.

United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims: \$30.98 million, \$7 million above the President's request, for the planning and design of a new facility for the Court.

Cemeterial Expenses: \$36.7 million, \$5.5 million above 2008 and the President's request, for Arlington cemetery. The additional funding will enable acceleration of the cemetery's Millennium Project.

Armed Forces Retirement Home: \$63 million from the Trust Fund, the same as the President's request, for operation and maintenance of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, including \$8 million for capital expenditures.