

News from Chairman

Chet Edwards

**Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military
Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies**

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Edwards: Final VA-Military Construction Bill Provides Historic Funding Increase for Veterans

(Washington, DC)— U.S. Representative Chet Edwards (TX17), Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, today hailed the record budget increases included in the final 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill conference agreement. Edwards, who authored the House bill, the final bill increases the VA budget by \$6.6 billion above the 2007 level, the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration. It is \$3.7 billion above the President's request for fiscal year 2008.

"This bill respects the service and sacrifice of America's veterans by providing a historic funding increase for veterans' health care and strongly supports our military families," said Edwards. "This bill is about respect and honors the promises made to our veterans to provide them the health care and benefits they earned when they put on our nation's uniform.

"For the 400,000 veterans, including combat wounded vets, who are having to wait too long to have their benefits cases reviewed, this bill means over 1,800 new VA case workers to reduce the unacceptable delays in receiving earned benefits," said Edwards.

The bill provides an unprecedented \$21.5 billion for military construction, family housing, and base realignment and closing process known as BRAC. The total for military construction is an increase of \$306 million over the President's request, which means better barracks, housing and training facilities when troops return from combat. The bill includes Edwards' Military Families Initiative, which will fund \$129 million to construct 16 new child care centers at military installations.

"I am particularly proud of what we were able to do in this bill for military families because military children and spouses are the unsung heroes in our nation's defense. They may not wear the uniform, but they make tremendous sacrifices every day for our country. Every year when the highest ranking non-commissioned officers testify before our subcommittee, they always highlight day care for military children as a top priority, but this priority always seems to get lost in the budget bureaucracy," said Edwards

The final conference agreement, which includes the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs and Labor-HHS appropriations bills, is expected to pass the House and Senate and be sent to the president next week.

Edwards is Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee.

Summary: Military Construction and Veterans Affairs

Department of Veteran's Affairs: \$43.1 billion, \$3.7 billion over the President's budget request for veterans medical care, claims processing personnel, and facility improvements.

- **Veterans' Health Care:** \$37.2 billion, \$2.6 billion over the President's budget request for VA hospitals and clinics, and research into conditions such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which are among the most common problems facing Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In 2008 the VA will treat 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.
- **Claims Processors:** \$124.2 million to provide 1800 new claims processors to address the 400,000 benefit claims backlog.
- **Travel Reimbursement:** \$125 million is included in the bill to increase the reimbursement rate for veterans who need to travel long distances for care from 11 cents/mile to 28.5 cents/mile.

Military Construction: \$21.5 billion, \$306 million above the President's budget request including \$129 million to construct 16 new child development centers.

- **Guard and Reserve:** \$ 1.1 billion, \$367 million above the President's budget request.