



# COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

---

Contact: Kirstin Brost, Full Committee, 202-225-2771  
Josh Taylor, Chairman Edwards, 202-225-6105

## **SUMMARY: 2009 MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AS PASSED BY THE HOUSE 8/1/08**

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 its #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 continues 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 starts by rejecting the President's proposal to cut the Department of Veterans Affairs construction by \$788 million, so that the Department has the resources it needs to address buildings that have fallen into disrepair.

It goes on to address the critical needs facing veterans medical care as soldiers return from Iraq and Afghanistan, building on the historic increases provided last year by:

- Increasing enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10 percent, ensuring that we keep our commitment to all veterans,
- Enable the department to hire roughly 2,100 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
- Increase gas mileage reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 41 cents per mile and freezes the deductible for veterans traveling long distances for care.

For active duty service members and their families, the bill provides \$336 million above the President's request for quality of life projects that will directly improve living conditions and health care delivery.

The subcommittee took its oversight responsibility seriously, holding 19 hearings and one briefing to examine the President's request.

### **Bill Total**

<b>2008 Enacted:</b>	<b>\$63.9 billion</b>
<b>President's Request:</b>	<b>\$69.3 billion</b>
<b>Committee Mark:</b>	<b>\$72.7 billion</b>

**MILITARY CONSTRUCTION:** \$24.8 billion, \$400 million above the President's request and \$4.2 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:** \$336 million, not requested by the President, to continue a quality of life initiative for troops and their families started in the 2008 supplemental including: nearly \$200 million for five 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 \$136 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:** \$9.1 billion, \$1.8 billion above 2008 and the same as the President's request, 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:** \$5.6 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.

**1990 BRAC:** \$473 million, \$178 million above 2008 and \$80 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, \$300 million above 2008, to further eliminate inadequate military housing.

**DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:** \$47.7 billion, \$4.6 billion above 2008 and \$2.9 billion over the President's request, for veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements.

**Veterans Health Administration:** \$40.8 billion, \$1.6 billion over the President's request and \$3.9 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:** \$30.9 billion, \$1 billion above the President's request and \$2.8 billion above 2008, to improve access to medical services for all veterans.
  - **Increase Enrollment of Priority 8 Veterans:** \$400 million, not requested by the President, to start enrolling 10 percent of 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 services are not available.

- **Beneficiary Travel:** \$100 million above the President's request to increase the beneficiary travel reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile.
  - **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, including \$32 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 given recent advances in technology.
- **Medical Support and Compliance:** \$4.4 billion, \$144 million above the President's request and \$338 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 by 10 percent.
  - **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. Includes \$68 million to support plans to increase enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10 percent.
  - **Medical and Prosthetic Research:** \$500 million, rejecting the President's \$38 million cut and \$20 million above 2008, for research to help improve the quality of life for injured and aging veterans. Restores the cuts to trauma and mental health research – important to veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Major and Minor Construction:** \$1.9 billion, rejecting the President's \$788 million cut and \$215 million above 2008, to fulfill the Department's commitment to fund recommendations made by the Capitol Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES), which was established to look at facilities and determine their construction needs. The increase in minor construction will enable the Department to complete 145 projects in fiscal year 2009.

**Extended Care Facilities:** \$165 million, rejecting the President's \$80 million cut and the same as 2008, for grants to States for construction and renovation of extended care facilities. The funding level will meet identified life/safety needs and still provide funding for construction of additional new 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 2,100 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.

**Information Technology:** \$2.5 billion, \$232 million above 2008 and \$50 million above the President's request, 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 personnel for oversight activities, including inspections of community based outpatient clinics and VA Centers.

## **RELATED AGENCIES**

**American Battle Monuments Commission:** \$55.5 million, \$11 million above 2008 and \$8 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:** \$73.98 million, \$51 million above 2008 and \$50 million above the President's request, for the acquisition of a new facility for the Court.

**Cemeterial Expenses:** \$31.2 million, matching 2008 and the President's request, for Arlington cemetery.

**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 at the DC campus.

###