

News from Congressman

Chet Edwards

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

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Chairman Edwards Hails Record Increases in Fiscal Year 2008 House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill, Chairman's Mark Includes \$6.7 Billion Increase for VA, \$8.2 Billion Increase for Military Construction Over 2007

(Washington, DC)— U.S. Representative Chet Edwards, Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee, today marked up the subcommittee's fiscal year 2008 bill. The Chairman's Mark includes a \$6.7 billion increase in the Department of Veterans Affairs budget and \$8.2 billion increase in military construction over 2007 levels.

"This bill sends a clear message to America's servicemen and women, their families and our veterans that a grateful nation deeply respects their service and sacrifice. It says to all who have served that just as you have kept your promises to country, we intend to keep our promises to you.

"We keep our promises to veterans by providing the largest increase in funding for veterans health care in the VA's 77-year history. In addition, we seek to reduce the 177 day average wait for veterans to receive their earned benefits by more than doubling the number of benefits personnel the VA hires this year.

"We keep our promises to our servicemen and women and their families by providing an \$8.2 billion increase over fiscal 2007 for military construction, family housing and BRAC. We fully fund the President's request for BRAC and add \$207 million to his military construction request, which will allow us to improve training and quality of life facilities for active duty troops and Members of the Guard and Reserves.

"This bill respects the sacrifice of our servicemen and women, veterans and their families by providing \$109.2 billion total, \$4 billion more than requested by the Administration and \$18 billion above fiscal year 2007 levels."

Veterans Affairs:

- This bill shows that care for our veterans is a real cost of war and increases the VA budget by \$6.7 billion above the FY07 level, the largest single increase in the 77 year history of the Veterans Administration and \$3.8 billion above the President's request for FY08.
- For the 1st time, the total budget for VA medical accounts exceeds the Independent Budget prepared by veterans' service organizations by \$294 million.
- This bill significantly reduces the 400,000 claims backlog by adding over 1000 new claims processors.
- Increases funding to address the VA's repair and maintenance needs to prevent a Walter Reed type scandal from occurring in the VA system.

Military Construction:

- The bill provides an unprecedented \$21.4 billion for military construction, family housing, and BRAC. This is an increase of \$207 million over the President's request and \$8.2 billion over FY07, which means better barracks, housing and training facilities when troops return from combat.
- Fully funds the 2005 base realignment and closure process (BRAC) at \$8.2 billion. Supports the relocation of 70,000 troops from bases in Korea and Europe.
- Provides funds to grow our military forces and begins the process of adding 65,000 Army, 27,000 Marine, and 9,000 National Guard and Reserve troops.