

[H.R. 2029, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2016](#)

FLOOR SITUATION

On Wednesday, April 29, 2015, the House will begin consideration of [H.R. 2029](#), *the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2016*, under a [modified-open rule](#). The bill was introduced on April 24, 2015 by Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA), Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies. The bill was ordered reported by the Committee on Appropriations, as amended, on April 22, 2015, by voice vote.¹

SUMMARY

H.R. 2029 provides \$171 billion in budget authority for the Fiscal Year 2016 programs and activities funded in the bill. The fiscal year 2016 recommendation is an increase of \$5.0 billion above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level and \$2.2 billion below the President's request. Included in this amount is \$94.5 billion in mandatory budget authority and \$76.6 billion in discretionary budget authority.²

H.R. 2029 provides \$76.6 billion in discretionary funding—\$4.6 billion above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level and \$2.2 billion below the President's budget request. This represents a 5.6 percent increase over the Fiscal Year 2015 level for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Of this funding \$58.7 billion was provided in advance in the fiscal year 2015 appropriations bill. Military construction is increased by \$904 million over the fiscal year 2015 enacted level, which allows for full funding of family housing, construction of hospitals and health facilities, and support for critical overseas investments.³

The major provisions of the bill are as follows:

¹ See Committee on Appropriations press release: "[Appropriations Committee Approves the Fiscal Year 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Legislation](#)," April 22, 2015.

² [House Report 114-92](#) at 2.

³ See Committee on Appropriations press release: "[Appropriations Committee Releases Fiscal Year 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Legislation](#)," April 14, 2015.

Title I—Department of Defense (military construction)

The bill provides a total of \$7.7 billion for military construction projects—an increase of \$904 million above the enacted Fiscal Year 2015 level and \$755 million below the President's request. This includes funds for large and small construction and renovation projects on military bases within the U.S. and around the globe. Of the amount provided for Military Construction projects, \$532 million is provided for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).⁴

Military Family Housing: The bill provides \$1.4 billion to fund construction and operation and maintenance of military family housing for fiscal year 2016. This is \$223 million above the Fiscal Year 2015 level and the same as the budget request. The funding will ensure quality housing is sustained for all 1.3 million military families currently served by the program.

Military Medical Facilities: The bill includes \$607 million for construction and alterations for new or existing military medical facilities, an increase of \$121 million above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level. This funding will allow for continued support and care for 9.8 million eligible beneficiaries, including our wounded troops abroad.

Department of Defense (DOD) Education Facilities: The bill includes \$334 million for essential safety improvements and infrastructure work at 10 DOD Education Activities facilities located within the U.S. and overseas.

Guard and Reserve: The bill includes \$512 million for construction or alteration of Guard and Reserve facilities in 28 States, an increase of \$85 million above the fiscal year 2015 enacted level.

NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP): The bill provides \$150 million—\$30 million over the President's request and \$49.7 million below fiscal year 2015—for infrastructure necessary for wartime, crisis, and peace support and deterrence operations, and training requirements. The funds will support responses to the challenges posed by Russia and to the risks and threats emanating from the Middle East and North Africa.

Military construction accounts provide funds for new construction, construction improvements, planning and design, and host nation support. Projects funded by these accounts include facilities for operations, training, maintenance, research and development, supply, medical care, and force protection, as well as unaccompanied housing, utilities infrastructure, and land acquisition.⁵

Title II—Department of Veterans Affairs

The bill includes a total of \$163.2 billion in both discretionary and mandatory funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs, an increase of \$4.1 billion above the fiscal year 2015 level. Of the total, \$94.5 billion is provided for mandatory benefit programs and \$68.7 billion is allocated to discretionary programs such as medical care, claims processing, and construction. Approximately \$58.7 billion of this discretionary total was provided last year via advance funding in the Fiscal Year

⁴ Id.

⁵ [House Report 114-92](#) at 16.

2015 Appropriations bill. In this bill, discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs is recommended at 5.6 percent over the Fiscal Year 2015 level.⁶

VA Medical Services: The bill funds VA medical services at \$48.6 billion – providing for approximately 6.9 million patients to be treated in Fiscal Year 2016. Within this total, funding includes: \$7.5 billion in mental health care services; \$144 million in suicide prevention activities; \$232 million for traumatic brain injury treatment; \$6.7 billion in homeless veterans treatment, services, housing, and job training; and \$250 million in rural health initiatives.

VA Electronic Health Record: The bill contains \$233 million for the modernization of the Veterans Affairs electronic health record system. To help ensure our veterans get proper care through the timely and accurate exchange of medical data between VA, DOD, and the private sector, the bill includes language restricting funding until the VA demonstrates progress on the system's functionality and interoperability.

Disability Claims Processing Backlog: The bill provides \$290 million for the paperless claims processing system, \$141 million for digital scanning of health records, and \$26 million for centralized mail. In addition, the bill continues rigorous reporting requirements to track each regional office's performance on claims processing. The bill also includes funding to support 770 new staff to tackle claims appeals and other needs resulting from the progress in reducing the claims backlog.

Construction: Major and minor construction within the VA is funded at approximately \$968 million. The bill provides funding for hospital replacement and allows the VA to continue to correct seismic safety issues and deficiencies. In response to egregious project mismanagement and cost overruns, the Committee has held major construction to the Fiscal Year 2015 funding level, and taken the oversight actions listed below.

Oversight: The legislation includes provisions to increase oversight of taxpayer dollars at the VA, including limiting transfers between construction projects, reporting on bid savings, limiting changes in the scope of construction projects, and restricting the agency from taking certain spending actions without notifying Congress.

VA Mandatory Funding: The bill fulfills mandatory funding requirements such as: veteran disability compensation programs for 4.7 million veterans and their survivors; education benefits for nearly 1.2 million veterans; and vocational rehabilitation and employment training for more than 137,000 veterans.

Advance Appropriations: The bill contains \$63.3 billion in advance Fiscal Year 2017 funding for veterans' medical programs—the same level as the President's request. This funding will provide for medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities, and ensure that our veterans have continued, full access to their medical care needs. For the first time, the bill includes \$104 billion in advance funding for VA mandatory benefit programs, as requested in the President's budget.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) serves approximately 48.3 million people or 15 percent of the total estimated resident population of the U.S. and Puerto Rico: 22 million veterans and 26.3

⁶ Id. at 3.

million family members of living veterans or survivors of deceased veterans. The VA employs 342,000 people, making it one of the largest Federal agencies in terms of employment.⁷

Title III—Related Agencies

The bill includes \$244.3 million for Related Agencies funded in the bill. Agencies funded under this title include the American Battle Monuments Commission, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, and Civil Cemeterial Expenses, which includes Arlington National Cemetery and the Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery.⁸

Arlington National Cemetery: The bill includes \$71 million for the Arlington National Cemetery, an increase of \$5 million from the Fiscal Year 2015 enacted level. In addition, the bill provides \$30 million within military construction for Defense Access Roads to improve traffic flow and access to Fort Myer, and to increase the amount of land available for burials and interments.

American Battle Monuments Commission: The bill includes \$75.1 million for the American Battle Monuments Commission (AMBC), an increase of \$1 million from the Fiscal Year 2015 enacted level. The AMBC is responsible for the administration, operation and maintenance of cemetery and war memorials to commemorate the achievements and sacrifices of the American Armed Forces where they have served since April 6, 1917. In performing these functions, the Commission maintains 25 permanent American military cemetery memorials and 26 monuments, memorials, and markers.

Title IV—Overseas Contingency Operations

The bill provides \$532 million for projects in support of Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)/Global War on Terrorism.

Title V—General Provisions

The bill includes the following general provisions:⁹

Section 501 prohibiting the obligation of funds beyond the current fiscal year unless expressly so provided.

Section 502 prohibiting the use of funds for programs, projects or activities not in compliance with Federal law relating to risk assessment, the protection of private property rights, or unfunded mandates.

Section 503 encouraging all departments and agencies funded in this Act to expand the use of “E-Commerce” technologies and procedures.

Section 504 specifying the Congressional committees that are to receive all reports and notifications.

⁷ [House Report 114-92](#) at 31.

⁸ Id at 69 to 72.

⁹ Id. at 73 and 74.

Section 505 prohibiting the transfer of funds to any instrumentality of the United States Government without authority from an appropriations Act.

Section 506 prohibiting any funds in this Act to be used for a project or program named for an individual serving as a Member, Delegate, or Resident Commissioner of the United States House of Representatives.

Section 507 requiring all reports submitted to the Congress to be posted on official websites of the submitting agency.

Section 508 prohibiting the use of funds to establish or maintain a computer network unless such network blocks the viewing, downloading, and exchanging of pornography, except for law enforcement investigation, prosecution or adjudication activities.

Section 509 prohibiting the use of funds for payment of first-class travel by an employee of the executive branch.

Section 510 prohibiting the use of funds in this Act for any contract where the contractor has not complied with [E-Verify](#) requirements.

Section 511 prohibiting the use of funds in this Act by the Department of Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purchase or lease of a new vehicle except in accordance with [Presidential Memorandum—Federal Fleet Performance](#), dated May 24, 2011.

Section 512 prohibiting the use of funds in this Act for the renovation, expansion, or construction of any facility in the continental United States for the purpose of housing any individual who has been detained at the United States Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Section 513 establishing a “Spending Reduction Account” in the bill.

BACKGROUND

The programs funded by the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act provide the facilities and infrastructure needed to house, train, and equip our military personnel to defend this nation, both in the United States and abroad; provide the housing and military community infrastructure that supports a good quality of life for them and their families; and allow the military to maintain an efficient and effective base structure. The bill also funds programs to ensure that all veterans receive the benefits and medical care that they have earned as a result of the sacrifices they have made in their service to our country. The bill also funds four related agencies that provide support to our nation’s heroes: the American Battle Monuments Commission, Cemeterial Expenses, Army (including Arlington National Cemetery), the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, and the Armed Forces Retirement Home.¹⁰

COST

If enacted, H.R. 2029 would result in discretionary budget authority of \$76.6 billion.

¹⁰ [House Report 114-92](#) at 2.

AMENDMENTS/STAFF CONTACT

For questions about amendments or further information on the bill, contact [Jerry White](#) with the House Republican Policy Committee by email or at 5-0190.

About the Digest: *The Legislative Digest summarizes each bill that comes to the House floor, including a procedural description, the legislative background, and a cost estimate. The House Republican Conference produced the digest from 1995 until the House Republican Policy Committee took over production in April of 2015.*