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WASHINGTON, DC 20510  
March 27, 2015

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
BUDGET  
ENERGY AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
INTELLIGENCE  
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Kirk  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Military Construction,  
Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Kirk, and Ranking Member Tester:

I respectfully submit the following requests for funding and language to be included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs (VA) and Related Agencies appropriations bill and report:

**Department of the Navy**  
**Military Construction**

***P-266 Portsmouth Navy Shipyard Structural Shops Consolidation***

P-266 would consolidate structural and pipe fitting operations currently located throughout Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. It was developed with the goal of returning mission-critical attack submarines to the Fleet faster than the status quo and has become an essential priority for the shipyard. P-266 was authorized by Congress in the FY14 NDAA (P.L. 113-66), and \$11.5 million in funding was approved by Congress in the FY14 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-46). A reduced scope government estimate, however, places the cost of P-266 at \$29.8 million. Recognizing how vital this project is to the repair and overhaul mission at PNSY, I request the following language be included in the report accompanying the bill:

Portsmouth Naval Shipyard Project to Consolidate Structural Shops--*P-266 is a construction project that would consolidate structural and pipe fitting operations currently located throughout Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. It was developed with the goal of returning mission-critical attack submarines to the Fleet faster than the status quo and has become an essential priority. P-266 was authorized by Congress in the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 113-66), and \$11.5 million in funding for P-266 was approved by Congress in the Fiscal Year 2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-46). A reduced scope government estimate, however, places the cost of P-266 at \$29.8 million. Recognizing how vital this project is to the repair and overhaul mission at PNSY and clear congressional intent to authorize and fund P-266, the*

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*Committee supports approval of reprogramming funds for this purpose and urges the Department of the Navy to approve reprogramming \$18.3 million from existing funds in order to fully fund P-266.*

In the event that a reprogramming request is not approved by the Navy or by Congress, I respectfully request that the balance of P-266 be funded in the bill.

**Department of the Air Force**  
**Air National Guard**  
***Bangor International Airport***

I support the President's FY 2016 request of \$7.2 million for the Fire Crash/Rescue station at the Bangor International Airport in Bangor, Maine for the Air National Guard. The project will include work on existing structure by HVAC renovations roof replacement and exterior work to support 10-PAA KC-135 aircraft training and operations missions. The current station is not properly sized to support the 41 full time state employees, 27 guard members and all their required equipment.

**Department of Veterans Affairs**  
**Veterans Health Administration**  
***Office of Rural Health***

I urge the Committee to fully fund programs under the Office of Rural Health (ORH) within the Veterans Health Administration as proposed in the President's FY 2016 budget request, especially the Access Received Closer to Home pilot program. According to the VA, 33 percent of veterans enrolled in the VA health care system reside in rural areas.

ORH identifies and implements initiatives that support rural clinics and rural home-based primary care, address barriers to access and quality of health care delivery in rural areas, develop workforce recruitment and retention initiatives, and accelerate and expand telehealth. ORH also operates Rural Health Resource Centers and works with federal and non-federal community partners to share resources and expand access to care for rural veterans. These initiatives received \$250 million in FY 2015.

***Access Received Closer to Home Program***

Within the ORH, I strongly support the Access Received Closer to Home pilot program, which was reauthorized for an additional two years by Congress in 2014. This highly successful pilot program provides health care services to rural populations of veterans through non-VA health care providers. Given its proven record of improving access to quality health care for rural veterans, I request adequate funding for the program in FY 2016 and ask that the following language be included in the report to accompany the bill:

*Access Received Closer to Home.--The funds provided for the Rural Health Initiative include support for Project Access Received Closer to Home (Project ARCH). The Committee notes that the ARCH pilot program has been successful in benefiting rural and highly rural veterans in the States in which it operates. Current Veteran Integrated Service Network analysis demonstrates that more than 90 percent of veterans who received primary care services through the ARCH program were "completely satisfied" with the care, and cited significantly shortened travel times. Given the success of this program, Section 104 of the VACA extended the authorization of Project ARCH for an additional two years. Given its proven track record, the VA is directed to*

*consider the ARCH program as a model for establishing and maintaining a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with providers in the local community, which can remove barriers to accessing care for veterans in rural and highly rural areas.*

### ***Homeless Veterans Programs***

I support the President's FY 2016 budget request for \$1.4 billion for targeted programs to prevent and reduce homelessness among veterans. Specifically, I support funding the Grant and Per Diem Program (\$201 million), Supportive Services for Veterans Families (\$300 million), and case management services to veterans who receive HUD Section 8 rental assistance vouchers as part of the HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program (\$374 million). These programs received \$1.45 billion in FY 2015. These programs provide critical services to our veterans in need, and it is encouraging that, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's *2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*, homelessness among veterans has declined by 33 percent since 2010.

### ***Medical and Prosthetic Research Program***

I support the President's request for \$622 million for Medical and Prosthetic Research to fund research that facilitates and improves medical care for veterans. In particular, I support funding for the Veterans Health Administration's major research priorities, which currently emphasize the critical needs of the veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. This includes research targeting TBI, sensory loss, post-traumatic stress, suicide, and women veterans' health. The program received \$589 million in FY 2015.

### ***Mental Health***

I support the President's FY 2016 budget request for \$7.5 billion for mental health services to ensure accessible, patient-centered, recovery-oriented mental health care services for veterans. Mental Health Services were funded at \$7.1 billion in FY 2015.

### ***Women Veterans' Health Care***

I support the President's FY 2016 budget request for \$446 million for women veterans' health care. Women comprise nearly 15 percent of today's active duty military forces, and the number of women enrolling in VA health care services has doubled since 2001. Women veterans' health care was funded at \$411 million in FY 2015.

### ***Advance Appropriations***

I support the President's FY 2016 budget request for \$63.3 billion for advance appropriations for medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities to ensure certainty and continuity of funding for the delivery of medical care for veterans in FY 2016. An advance appropriation of \$60 billion for FY 2016 was provided in the FY 2015 funding bill.

## **Veterans' Benefits Administration Advance Appropriations**

I support the President's budget request of \$104 billion for first-ever advance appropriations for three mandatory benefit programs in FY 2017: Compensation and Pensions, Readjustment Benefits, and Insurance and Indemnities.

### **Agent Orange**

I respectfully request the following language be included in the report to the bill, in the appropriate place:

*Agent Orange Registry.--The VA maintains an Agent Orange Registry for veterans who served in Vietnam. The Committee is aware, however, of a number of instances where U.S. veterans may have been exposed to chemicals including Agent Orange during training activities and missions outside of Vietnam. The Committee directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide a report to the appropriate Committees no later than 180 days after enactment of this act on the feasibility of establishing a registry of U.S. veterans who served or trained outside of Vietnam and have subsequently experienced health issues, which may have resulted from exposure to these chemicals.*

*Toxic Exposures.--The Committee directs the VA to research the residual impact to veterans of Agent Orange and other toxic exposures such as oil well fires and burn pits. No later than 180 days after enactment of this act, the Secretary shall provide a report to the Committees on Appropriations of both Houses of Congress detailing the Department's plans to research residual exposure to Agent Orange and other toxins.*

### **Construction**

#### **Grants for Construction of State Extended Care Facilities**

I request that you provide \$90 million (level funding) for grants to assist States acquire or construct State nursing home and domiciliary facilities, and to remodel, modify, or alter existing hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary facilities in state homes for furnishing care to veterans. State Veterans Homes across the nation provide care to approximately 53 percent of the VA's long-term care population at a cost equal to approximately 16 percent of the VA's long-term care annual budget. The President's FY 2016 budget requests \$80 million for these purposes.

#### **Strategic Capital Investment Planning Process**

I support the President's budget request of \$990,000 for the constructions of a new Community Living Center in at the Togus VA Medical Center in Augusta, Maine. I also support the President's budget request of \$990,000 for construction of a specialty care addition at the Togus VA Medical Center in Augusta, Maine. Both projects are included in the President's FY16 Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) Process Project List.

#### **Major Medical Facility Leases**

I support the President's budget request of \$6.85 million to lease a new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Portland, Maine. This lease would replace existing CBOC leases in Saco and Portland and enhance VA outpatient services by closing space, utilization, and Veteran access gaps identified in the Strategic Capital Investment Planning (SCIP) process.

**Offices of Inspectors General**

Offices of Inspectors General (OIGs) are an indispensable tool in the fight against waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. Through its partnership with OIGs across the government, Congress has been able to identify and reduce inefficient, ineffective and improperly functioning federal programs. Given their importance, I support adequately funding all the OIGs contained in the bill to ensure proper oversight is conducted over every taxpayer dollar spent by the federal government.

Recognizing the significant budget challenges facing the country, I appreciate your consideration of these requests and look forward to working with you as you develop the FY 2016 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill. If you have any questions about these requests, please contact me or have your staff contact Steve Smith at 202-224-5344 or [steve\\_smith@king.senate.gov](mailto:steve_smith@king.senate.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Angus King", with a horizontal line underneath.

Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator