

In this issue:

NP Speaks to Joint Hearing

FRA Honors Rep. Phil Roe

FY 2020 Budget Roll Out

Active Duty Tenant Bill of Rights

NP Washington Speaks to SVAC/HVAC Joint Hearing

The FRA's National President Robert Washington testified this week before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees (HVAC/SVAC). NP Washington asked Congress to pass legislation (S.422/H.R.299), which expands presumption for Blue Water Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange herbicide while serving off the coast of Vietnam. He thanked HVAC past Chairman Phil Roe (Tenn.) and current Chairman Rep. Mark Takano (Calif.) for passing the bill last year and their rapid re-introduction of the same legislation (H.R.299) this year.

Washington also discussed the importance of the VA Choice program and thanked the committees for expanding the VA Caregiver program to include all catastrophically disabled veterans. He expressed the association's deep concern about the high rate of veteran suicides and thanked President Trump for creating the veterans suicide task force (See last week's [NewsBytes](#) for details). Washington thanked HVAC Chairman Mark Takano (Calif.) for creating a task force to address barriers that women face when trying to obtain benefits and health care from the VA.

FRA Honors Rep. Phil Roe

The Pinnacle award, FRA's most prestigious award, is given to one representative or senator each year. During the 115th Congress, Congressman Dr. Phil Roe (Tenn.), a veteran himself, served as the chairman for the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC), and now is the ranking member in this current Congress. He has served six years on HVAC and has worked continuously to improve the lives and benefits for military retirees, veterans and active duty service members. He spearheaded the effort to pass the Agent Orange Blue Water legislation (H.R.299) last year that achieved a unanimous (382-0) passage in the House of Representatives. Though the bill ultimately failed in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Roe did successfully push for other FRA-supported bills such as the Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery (H.R.1725), the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act (H.R.2288)

and the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act (H.R.3218) to become law.

Roe was presented the award after FRA's National President, Robert Washington Sr., finished testifying at a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Washington and National Vice President Donna Jansky presented the award and thanked the congressman for his hard work on behalf of veterans.

FY 2020 Budget Roll Out

The administration released its FY2020 budget request this week. The request is more than a month behind schedule because the government shutdown slowed its arrival on Capitol Hill. This is a "skinny" budget scheduled be released on March 18, 2019 and does not provide as much detail as a full budget request. The proposed budget includes \$750 billion for the Department of Defense for FY2020, which is \$34 billion more than the current year spending level. It provides a 3.1 percent active duty pay increase-the largest increase in a decade and provides additional funding for childcare centers on bases. The budget provides funding for 46 more Navy ships in five years.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) budget request provides for a 9.6 percent increase (\$19.3 billion) above the current budget in overall spending for the agency. The proposed budget includes a 9.5 percent increase in medical care that includes a surge in mental health, women's health and homelessness funding. The budget increases money for modernization of disability claims process and appeals reform. The FRA will monitor the budget process to ensure adequate funding for the VA, with special attention for VA health care to ensure access and care for all beneficiaries.

Active Duty Tenant Bill of Rights

The Navy, Army and Air Force Secretaries announced at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee that they are preparing a joint Tenant Bill of Rights in an effort to ensure service members and their families have safe, quality homes and communities along with clear and understandable rights while living in them. It is intended to increase the accountability of privatized housing companies by putting more oversight authority in the hands of local military leaders. The hearing was an oversight meeting to review apparent abuses of on base privatized housing. A subcommittee hearing in February examined allegations of substandard housing.

The Military Family Advisory Network survey of active duty personnel found that 56 percent of the more than 17,000 respondents, reported a "negative" or "very negative" opinion of their living conditions, which the network concluded showed a "systemic problem." Many families claim health concerns and repairs have become "all-

consuming" for many families, diverting their focus from military duties and upcoming deployments. Much of military base housing was privatized in the mid-1990s due to deplorable conditions with government managed military housing. Concerns include mold, lead paint, raw sewage and other toxic exposures that have health impact for all residents, many of whom are young children. Also termites and rodents were reported.

All three service secretaries claimed they have seen firsthand and reviewed problems in housing units. The Tenant Bill of Rights is intended to help remedy them by both protecting and empowering service members and their families. The Tenant Bill of Rights will be enforced through renegotiated leases with the privatized housing companies. The Bills of Rights will be implemented in the coming weeks.