



VOICE FOR THE ARMY. SUPPORT FOR THE SOLDIER

[home](#)[email this newsletter to a friend](#)[print friendly version](#)[search back issues](#)

### IN THIS ISSUE

- ▶ [House Subcommittee Passes VA/Military Construction Legislation](#)
- ▶ [Bill would allow TRICARE Standard for "Gray Area" Retirees](#)
- ▶ [FCS Demonstration Held on Capitol Hill](#)

## House Subcommittee Passes VA/Military Construction Legislation

Last week, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs approved its funding legislation for fiscal 2009. The bill contains a record level of funding that will benefit America's veterans and military construction projects.

Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Texas said in a statement, "This bill builds on the historic increases in the fiscal year 2008 bill and sends a clear message to America's servicemen and women, their families, and our veterans that we appreciate and respect their service and sacrifice."

"Our veterans and active duty military personnel have made sacrifices that many of us cannot even imagine, and it is our duty to honor their service and provide sufficient funds to meet the expanding needs of our growing veteran and military communities," House Appropriations Ranking Republican Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., said after the legislation was approved.

The legislation includes:

- \$568 million to increase enrollment of Priority 8 veterans by 10 percent;
- \$50 million more to increase the beneficiary travel reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents to 35 cents for veterans traveling long distances for care;
- \$300 million to address the backlog in non-recurring maintenance at medical facilities;
- \$200 million to increase access to fee-based care for veterans in areas where the Department does not offer services;
- \$116 million more to increase availability of new generation prosthetics;
- \$58 million for medical research in trauma, mental health and other areas that are critical to finding the best treatments for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans;
- \$40 million more to provide the additional case workers and medical services needed for our homeless veterans;
- Ensures that the VA will spend no less than \$3.8 billion on specialty mental health services for veterans with mental illness, PTSD, and suicide prevention;
- \$584 million on Substance Abuse programs; and,

-- An increase in Department of Veterans Affairs Construction by \$1.1 billion above the President's request, which will provide the needed funding for six additional major construction projects and an additional 145 minor construction projects that can be completed in fiscal year 2009.

The full Appropriations Committee is expected to approve the bill this week.

## Bill would allow TRICARE Standard for "Gray Area" Retirees

Rep. Robert Latta, R-Ohio, recently introduced H.R. 6185, the TRICARE Continuity of Coverage for National Guard and Reserve Families Act of 2008. AUSA, along with its counterparts in the Military Coalition, supports this bill.

H.R. 6185 would allow members of the Guard and reserve in the "gray area" to purchase TRICARE Standard health care coverage. "Gray Area" individuals are Reserve component retirees under the age of sixty with 20 years or more of faithful and honorable service who are qualified for non-regular retired pay at age 60. Some of these retirees may spend 15-20 years in this status without full benefits before reaching age 60. There are approximately 220,000 members currently in the "gray area", with 12,100 members retiring and entering this status per year.

The legislation would allow qualified individuals to purchase TRICARE Standard coverage for 100 percent of the premium. Spouses and dependents can continue purchasing TRICARE at 100 percent of the premium if the retired reservist passes away before reaching age 60 and the member had been eligible at the time of death for TRICARE Standard coverage.

The Military Coalition sent Rep. Latta a letter thanking him for his leadership in introducing this legislation.

## FCS Demonstration Held on Capitol Hill

The Army hosted several members of Congress and congressional staff members at its public demonstration of the prototype Non- Line of Sight Cannon on the National Mall last week. The demonstration proved that the Future Combat Systems (FCS) has moved from power point slides and artists' conceptions to "the future is here."

Those were the words of Army Chief of Staff Gen, George W. Casey Jr., who made the comment while pointing to the cannon, the first of eight proposed manned ground vehicles to be prototyped. Rotorcraft unmanned aerial vehicles, small unmanned ground vehicles, advanced joint radios to unmanned sensors were also on display. "Some of these systems are already being used by our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan," Gen. Casey said.

In answer to a question, Gen. Casey said that the technologies in FCS are relevant for today's fight. He used the examples of a small unmanned aerial vehicle providing a soldier on patrol a view "around the corner, what's on a rooftop," small unmanned ground vehicles, robots, "to view something at the side of the road" or unmanned sensors determining what is inside a building. As the administration changes with the coming of the new year, he said, "It is incumbent upon us to demonstrate FCS' relevance to the Army now and down the road.

Again talking about the cannon's value in combat in the near term, "it gives me precision fires capability," particularly important in urban conflict. Gen. Casey said the common chassis vehicle was rolled out in early June but the cannon tube has been fired more than 2,000 times at the Yuma Proving Grounds, Ariz.

The Army expects FCS to be easier to maintain and sustain when fielded than today's tanks and fighting vehicles. Because of the common chassis and interoperable spares and parts, Gen. Casey said the logistical support needed for the manned vehicles in FCS would be reduced. The Army

expects a savings in combat service support manpower as well. "Instead of having a tank mechanic, a Bradley mechanic, you have one mechanic," who could work on all variants.

FCS is the Army's largest modernization program. When totally fielded, the 14 separate vehicles; the manned vehicles that share a common chassis and hybrid electric drive that will also provide power for onboard computer and communications systems, and network systems down to the platoon level, is expected to cost about \$160 billion. Funding in recent Army budgets for FCS has been running about \$3.5 billion per year. The program is scheduled for a major Defense Department and congressional review in fiscal 2009.

"We have been talking and briefing and telling people about FCS, and right here today it is real," Gen. Casey said.

Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., where Fort Sill, the home of Army artillery is located, said about the new cannon "It all goes back to Crusader [and] the black day in March of 2002 were told by the President of the United States we are going to X the program."

Crusader was also to be a non-line of sight cannon. "Today, we are looking at the blessing in disguise if they hadn't killed that program, that transition in my lifetime" away from the Paladin, reducing its crew from five to two because of its automatic loading capabilities and ability to fire six rounds a minute with precision.

Sen. Inhofe praised former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki, USA, Ret., who said, "we need to transform the entire ground forces of the United States Army" and not just changing one element such as a future artillery piece.

Sen. Inhofe said the non-line of sight technology was furthest along in development because of Crusader, so it was logical to move ahead first with prototyping the cannon.

MG Charles Cartwright, FCS program manager, said the choice of the National Mall for an exhibition and demonstration was fitting. "It's an open display. You don't have to travel to the west [for testing at Fort Bliss, Texas, White Sands Missile Range, N.M., or Yuma] to see it and try some of things out." Nearby soldiers were showing young and old tourists how to operate small unmanned ground vehicles.

He said soldiers assigned to the Training and Doctrine Command's Force Integration Directorate and the Army Evaluation Task Force at Bliss "are right in the middle of the testing phase. They tell us: we don't like this, try that."

Among the congressional attendees were Reps. Silvestre Reyes, D-Texas, and James Moran, D-Va.