

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE DOUGLAS A. COLLINS
SECRETARY
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
MAY 20, 2026**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Blumenthal, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of Veterans Affairs' fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget request.

Since taking office, I have had the privilege of meeting Veterans across this country—as well as the VA employees who serve them every day. Their dedication to delivering care and benefits to those who have served our Nation is what drives this Department forward.

But I also came into this role with a clear understanding of something many of you have said for years: VA needed reform.

For too long, this Department measured success by how much money it spent and how many people it employed—not by how well it served Veterans. That approach did not work. Veterans felt it, and the data proved it.

Under President Donald J. Trump's leadership, we are changing that.

At VA today, the Veteran is the mission—and the mission is the Veteran.

I know this Committee expects results for every dollar appropriated. We share that expectation, and this budget is built around it. Our focus is on access and accountability—and those principles are reflected throughout this request.

REFORMING VA TO DELIVER RESULTS

We did not wait for perfect conditions—we did something about it.

We took a hard look at the Department—its structure, staffing, contracts, and processes—and made common-sense changes to refocus VA on its core mission: serving Veterans.

That means protecting mission-critical roles—doctors, nurses, and claims processors—while reducing unnecessary layers of bureaucracy that slow down care and decision-making.

It means eliminating duplicative contracts and ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent where they matter most—on Veterans.

And it means being honest about what VA is—and what it is not.

VA is not a Federal jobs program, but in the past, it acted like one. During the Biden Administration, VA staffing increased 14%, even though patient encounters increased by just 6%.

We have faced resistance from those who prefer the status quo. But the status quo was not working for Veterans and we are not going back to it. VA is an organization whose sole purpose is to serve Veterans and every dollar spent must reflect that.

For this Subcommittee, that means a Department that is leaner where it should be, stronger where it must be, and accountable across the board. It also means ensuring these reforms translate into faster access, clearer decisions, and a better experience for Veterans navigating VA.

PROVING REFORM WORKS

We have proved reform works and it is possible at VA.

We did not wait—we acted. And because we acted, Veterans are seeing real results:

- Since taking office, we have cut the disability compensation claims backlog dramatically—by 69% as of April 13 while processing millions of claims at record pace, faster than at any point in VA’s history.
- We have expanded access to care, delivering over 140 million outpatient appointments in FY 2025 and increasing availability through extended hours and new clinics, a 6% increase from FY 2024.
- We have put the Electronic Health Record Modernization effort back on track, starting with our successful deployments in Michigan a few weeks ago. We are no longer accepting indefinite delays on this critical initiative and are rapidly moving to deploy the new system across the nation.
- We made real progress reaching vulnerable Veterans, including those at risk of homelessness. VA permanently housed 51,936 homeless Veterans across the country in FY 2025, the highest total in 7 years, and we are ensuring that each one of these Veterans receives the substance abuse, mental health, and medical services they need.

These are not abstract metrics. These are Veterans receiving benefits months sooner, getting medical appointments more conveniently, and finally seeing progress on operational challenges that lingered for years.

These improvements are also a major reason why more than 100,000 new Veterans have already enrolled in VA health care in 2026.

These are measurable outcomes.

This is the difference between talking about reform and delivering it. And more reforms are on the way.

We have begun restructuring the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which will streamline VHA operations, place more healthcare providers in healthcare roles – not administrative roles - and put the right people in the right places without reducing staff.

FY 2027 BUDGET REQUEST

Now, we need to build upon that momentum into the coming years of this Administration—not by expanding bureaucracy, but by scaling the reforms and results we have already delivered.

The FY 2027 request for VA is \$488.2 billion in total resources, which is a \$34.9 billion increase over FY 2026.

This request includes:

- \$150.6 billion in total available discretionary funding, an increase of \$12.3 billion (+8.9%);
- \$54.6 billion for the Toxic Exposures Fund (TEF), ensuring we meet our obligations under the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, or PACT Act (P.L. 117-168); and
- \$205.6 billion in operational funding to support care and services for Veterans (including discretionary and TEF funding).

Each investment is tied to a concrete improvement Veterans will notice: shorter waits, better coordination, and more consistent access to both VA and community care. This funding will support care for more than 9.4 million enrolled Veterans, deliver nearly 170 million outpatient visits, and provide disability benefits to more than 7.4 million Veterans and Survivors.

This request reflects disciplined growth—targeted investments tied directly to performance and outcomes. It is designed to expand access and strengthen accountability, ensuring Veterans see meaningful, tangible improvements in both care and benefits delivery.

This is not a request to sustain the status quo. It is a request to scale what is already working.

INVESTING IN WHAT WORKS

We are making targeted investments based on results—not assumptions.

Access to Care and Community Care

We are increasing total VA medical care funding by more than \$11 billion and community care by more than \$8 billion, ensuring Veterans receive timely care—whether at VA or in their communities.

For this Subcommittee, that means fewer delays, better access, and more efficient use of resources across the system.

Electronic Health Record Modernization

With \$4.24 billion in funding, we are accelerating deployment of a modern, interoperable system that improves coordination and reduces inefficiencies. In 2026, VA will deploy EHR to 13 additional sites in Michigan, Ohio, Alaska, Indiana, and Kentucky. In 2027 VA is prepared to deploy an additional 26 sites.

For Veterans, a modern record system means fewer repeated tests, improved availability of health data, and smoother coordination across providers—reducing frustration and improving continuity of care at every point of contact.

Infrastructure and Construction

The budget includes over \$5 billion in construction funding, in order to modernize facilities and expand capacity.

In addition, the budget proposes \$1.2 billion to provide a new medical center in Manchester, NH, \$1.6 billion to replace the medical center in Indianapolis, and \$30 million to begin the land acquisition necessary to replace the facility in San Antonio.

These investments are targeted—focused on readiness, safety, and long-term sustainability of VA infrastructure.

Suicide Prevention and Outreach

We continue to prioritize suicide prevention with a \$727 million investment, focusing on reaching Veterans who are not currently engaged with VA.

This is about ensuring VA benefits and services reach those who need them most, not just those already in the system.

Ending Veteran Homelessness

The budget includes over \$3.8 billion to support veterans at risk and experiencing homelessness, and \$500 million to support implementation for the National Center for Warrior Independence in West LA. We are working diligently to meet the President's goal of ending veteran homelessness, to include improved coordination of housing programs across VA and more effective coordination of servicemember transition with the Department of War.

ACCOUNTABILITY TO VETERANS AND TAXPAYERS

Eliminating waste and duplication is not about cutting for the sake of cutting—it is about ensuring every Veteran sees the benefit of every invested taxpayer dollar. When we eliminate inefficiencies, we free resources that directly improve care, benefits, and service delivery for Veterans.

This budget is grounded in accountability.

We are ensuring that:

- Funding is tied to measurable outcomes—not just spending levels;
- Wasteful programs are reformed or eliminated;
- Oversight is strengthened across operations and procurement; and
- Resources are aligned with mission delivery—not bureaucracy.

VA is ensuring every dollar is justified, tracked, and delivering value while also strengthening transparency and accountability so Veterans and Congress can clearly see how resources are improving access and outcomes. VA has already demonstrated that we can improve outcomes while being better stewards of taxpayer dollars.

PARTNERSHIP WITH CONGRESS

We appreciate the partnership of this Subcommittee and its Members.

We are asking for your support to continue this work—to sustain the reforms already underway and expand the results Veterans are already experiencing.

We remain committed to partnering with each of you to ensure resources are used efficiently and responsibly, while also ensuring these investments translate into measurable gains in access and accountability.

This is a moment to reinforce what is working—not revert to what was not.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of every reform we are implementing and every investment we are making is a simple promise: that Veterans receive the care and benefits they earned with the dignity and timeliness they deserve.

Our FY 2027 budget request gives VA the tools to deliver better care, faster benefits, and a more accountable Department for the Veterans, families, caregivers, and survivors we are honored to serve every day of the year.

Thank you for your time and your continued support. I look forward to your questions.