

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell today voted to make improving veterans' health care a top national priority by securing the funding to hire more doctors, reduce waiting times for doctors' appointments and provide more assistance to veterans suffering from traumatic brain injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The House passed, H.R. 2642, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations for FY 2008 by a 409 to 2 vote.

"At a time of war and incredible need, the last Congress slashed veterans' funding and we're seeing the effects of that today," said Mitchell. "These funds will help the VA deliver the health care that our men and women in uniform have earned and deserve."

National veterans' groups have praised the bill. Last month, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars called the bill "a significant, much-needed investment in health care and the benefits delivery system for our nation's sick and disabled veterans," according to AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars. [Source: [Disabled American Veterans](#)]

The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill

- Increases the VA budget by \$6.7 billion above the FY 2007 level, making it the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans' Administration.
- Significantly reduces the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits by adding more than 1,100 new claims processors.
- Provides much-needed maintenance of VA health care facilities. The VA recently outlined 1,000 specific problems at VA health facilities around the country with a backlog of \$5 billion in maintenance.
- Provides \$600 million more than the President's request for mental health, PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury and makes five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fully operational this year to care for those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan , including those with TBI.
- To improve the transition from the Defense Department to the VA, the bill permits the VA to transfer up to \$15 million for a joint program to improve access to care.
- Develops and operates a toll-free telephone and web-based hotline for veterans to report on deficiencies in VA medical facilities and care.