

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell and the U.S. House of Representatives today overwhelmingly voted to pass the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act, which establishes new guidelines to help wounded servicemembers returning from combat get the care they need. The bill passed 426-0.

"This is an important victory for our nation's wounded soldiers, and our veterans," said Mitchell. "I'm very proud to have played a role in working to make sure that what happened at Walter Reed never happens again."

Mitchell and U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel of Illinois were the first to introduce House legislation in the wake of the reports of problems at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Mitchell introduced the Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act of 2007 after The Washington Post exposed numerous problems at Walter Reed, including moldy walls and rodent droppings in the rooms of recovering troops, and the difficulties soldiers and their families had navigating through the government bureaucracy.

Many of the provisions included in the original Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act were included in the final Wounded Warriors Assistance Act, including

- Establishing a maximum acceptable ration between medical case managers and servicemembers receiving outpatient care,
- Establishing guidelines for Department of Defense-wide training for case managers,
- Establishing guidelines for communication between case managers, servicemembers and their families,
- Requiring annual reports from installation commanders on the status of military medical facilities and relations support facilities and report the results to the Congress,
- Establishing a Defense Department hotline for outpatients to report support facility deficiencies,
- Establishing a requirement to assign servicemember advocates to assist troops with financial, administrative, transitional and other problems.

Mitchell made the following statement on the House floor prior to the bill's passage:

"Just weeks ago, an outraged nation learned about the terrible conditions many of our wounded warriors had to endure as they recovered from their battlefield injuries at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. We have all heard the sad stories of moldy walls and rat droppings at Building 18.

"Even worse, we learned that these dilapidated conditions extended beyond Walter Reed, to other military facilities... and even veterans' facilities, where troops turned veterans faced a long, complicated and confusing process to get the benefits and care they have earned.

"Conditions like these, and miles of bureaucratic red tape, rob our troops and veterans of what they deserve the most: dignity; respect; honor.

"It is absolutely unacceptable, and I am proud that this Congress is taking action.

"Just last week, the House approved more than \$20 million to clean up the mess at Walter Reed. And we approved more than \$550 million to get rid of the backlog of maintenance requests at veterans' facilities. That's a good start.

"Last month, I introduced the Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act of 2007, which was the first legislation introduced in this House to prevent another episode like that at Walter Reed from ever happening again. And I commend the House Armed Services Committee for putting forward this legislation, which also establishes guidelines for how returning soldiers should be treated and measures of accountability.

"All of our troops - and all of our veterans - are entitled to quality health care, and should be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

"These are great first steps, but we still have a long way to go to ensure our troops and veterans are treated properly. They have my commitment that we will continue to take care of them just as they took care of us."