

Advanced funding for VA will ensure that veterans' health care is not compromised by delays in the congressional budget cycle

WASHINGTON - The U.S. House of Representatives today passed the Fiscal Year 2010 Military Construction-Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill, H.R. 3082, which included one of Rep. Harry Mitchell's key priorities for veterans: advanced funding for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The bill, which Mitchell voted for, passed with an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 415-3.

"This bill represents a victory for our veterans," Mitchell said. "Veterans health care should not be compromised by delays in the congressional budget cycle. Advanced funding will ensure that delivery of care is both reliable and timely."

The FY 2010 Military Construction-VA bill includes \$53 billion for the VA for FY 2010. It also includes \$48.2 billion in advance funding for the VA for FY 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services, medical support and compliance, and medical facilities. As a result it would provide more reliable and timely funding to support the delivery of medical care for veterans.

Mitchell has called for advanced funding for the VA, and is a cosponsored H.R. 1016, the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009 which includes authorization for advanced funding.

If enacted, the appropriations bill will provide funding for 1,200 additional claims processors to help address backlogs at the VA.

The bill represents a 58 percent increase in funding for veterans health care and benefits since January 2007 which has resulted in a total increase of 145 community-based outpatient clinics, 70 Vet Centers, more than 47,000 additional Veterans Health Administration employees, and 8,300 claims processors to help address the significant claims backlog that has delayed benefits to hundreds of thousands of veterans.

These additional resources are intended to provide veterans with their benefits more quickly and improve access to health care and other services.

Mitchell Priority for Veterans Gains House Approval in VA Appropriations Bill

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Additionally, the bill includes \$2.8 billion for new military hospitals, \$1 billion for new child care centers to serve 20,000 military children, and \$570 million in additional funding for barracks.

Mitchell has been an advocate for veterans in Congress. Last year he joined Senator Jim Webb from Virginia to pass the Post-9/11 GI Bill of Rights for members of the military who have served on active duty since September 11, 2001, including activated reservists and members of the National Guard. Eligible members receive up to four academic years of education benefits, including stipends for housing and books. On August 1, 2009 the veterans will begin receiving their benefits.

Mitchell serves on the House Veterans Affairs Committee and is Chairman of its Oversight and Investigation Subcommittee.