

Washington, DC (June 29, 2012) – Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Palm Harbor), Vice Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, on Friday introduced legislation that would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide caskets or urns for veterans with no next of kin and insufficient resources to cover burial and funeral expenses.

The legislation comes after it was discovered that Pvt. Lawrence Davis Jr., a World War II veteran with no next of kin, was buried in a cardboard box at Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, Fla.

"America's veterans deserve to be laid to rest the same way they served this nation: With dignity and honor," Bilirakis said. "This legislation recognizes their service and ensures that veterans who do not have immediate family are not forgotten and receive proper respect upon their passing."

The bill would also improve communication between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the entity responsible for the deceased veteran (medical examiner, funeral director, county service group, etc.) to determine if there is no next of kin.

Original co-sponsors of the legislation include Reps. Jeff Miller (R-Pensacola), Chairman of the House Veterans Committee, Richard Nugent (R-Brooksville), Bill Young (R-Indian Shores), Connie Mack (R-Fort Myers), Dennis Ross (R-Lakeland), and Kathy Castor (D-Tampa).

Florida Senators Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio have both co-sponsored a bill in the Senate titled "The Dignified Burial of Veterans Act of 2012."