

July 31, 2007

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.), member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs and chairman of the GOP Policy Committee's Veterans' Affairs Task Force, supported three important veterans-related pieces of legislation approved by the House of Representatives on Monday.

These bills would enhance veterans' health care and benefits through a wide array of initiatives, improve the affordability of hospice care for veterans, augment housing benefits to severely wounded servicemembers transitioning to civilian life, and expand services and assistance for homeless and low-income veterans.

"As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, it is my top priority to pass legislation that provides the best benefits and services for our service men and women transitioning into civilian life," said Bilirakis. "These bills were passed in a bipartisan manner by the House, and, if enacted, would greatly improve the life of our nation's veterans and their families."

Summary of the bills are as follows:

H.R. 2623 would prohibit the collection of co-payments for all hospice care furnished by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

H.R. 2874 would enhance the delivery of veterans' health care through a broad array of initiatives including counseling and mental health services for servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, expanding services and assistance for homeless and very low-income veterans, requiring VA domiciliary programs meet the needs of women veterans, and makes permanent a program to treat participants in Defense Department chemical and biological testing.

H.R. 1315 would authorize VA to provide specially adapted housing benefits to severely wounded servicemembers convalescing as they await discharge from the service. It would also authorize scholarships for students studying blind rehabilitation in exchange for a period of obligated service at VA in that specialty.

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