

Amendment to H.R. 1538, the Wounded Warriors Assistance Act

March 28, 2007

I rise to offer an amendment made in order under the rule (Bilirakis amendment).

Like all of my colleagues, I was greatly disturbed by the conditions at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, which were depicted in the Washington Post. Last week, I introduced H.R. 1580, the Wounded Warriors Joint Health Care Ombudsman Act. My legislation is intended to create a single point of reference for recovering service members and their families to ensure they are receiving prompt responses and information to their questions.

The amendment that I am offering today is a modified version of my legislation, and it creates a Department of Defense-wide Ombudsman Office within the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The functions of the Ombudsman Office are to provide policy guidance and oversight to each military departments. Specifically, the office would develop policy guidance with respect to providing assistance to and answering questions from recovering service members and their families on a variety of important issues.

The policy guidance developed by the Ombudsman Office should allow recovering service members to get information on administrative processes, financial assistance, the transition to care from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the support services available upon the member's return home.

The Ombudsman Office would also establish accountability standards for the military departments. These standards would cover issues such as creating and maintaining case files for specific questions received, as well tracking the responses for all such questions. The office would also set timeliness standards for responses.

Under my amendment, the Ombudsman Office can also require each military department to submit status reports of actions taken to address individual concerns raised by recovering service members and their families.

In closing, everyone agrees that our military service members should receive the highest quality of care and services possible. As they recover from their injuries, our wounded warriors shouldn't have to battle a bureaucracy to get the care and benefits they have earned. It is my intention that the ombudsman be an advocate for service members during every phase of the treatment and evaluation process.

I urge my colleagues to support this important amendment.

I reserve the balance of my time.