

Rep. Bilirakis: Veterans Funding Should Be a Priority

WASHINGTON (7 Nov.) --

On Tuesday, U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.), a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, was not pleased with House Democrat attempts to combine a popular Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill with a widely controversial Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spending measure.

Despite his objections, Bilirakis did vote for final passage of the Conference Report. The bill, which passed the House just short of the two-thirds veto-proof margin, has been assured a swift veto by the President.

"While I supported both bills individually when they originally came before the House, I do not believe that veterans funding should be held hostage by the inclusion of a more controversial measure," said Bilirakis. "Even though I am not pleased with the way in which this bill has been presented to the House by the Majority, I am fully committed to our nation's veterans and will not vote to stand in the way of them getting the important funding this bill provides."

For weeks, Congressman Bilirakis has been pressing Democrat House and Senate leaders for action on the veterans' bill to no avail. On Sept. 17th and Nov. 7th, Bilirakis signed letters to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi urging her in the strongest possible terms to move veterans funding as a stand alone measure. In a similar letter on Oct. 4th, to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Bilirakis joined his colleagues in imploring the Senate to also act.

"The Majority has waited long enough to get this bill moving, and we must work together despite the circumstances of this vote, to get a veterans' funding bill to the President for his signature and not his veto," said Bilirakis. "A certain veto by the President will only further delay veterans funding. Every day this legislation is delayed, our veterans are losing \$18.5 million and this is absolutely unacceptable."

The Conference Report included language, at the request of Bilirakis, calling for a feasibility study for placing a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Brandon, Fla. This study furthers the possibility of having a CBOC based in the Brandon area to provide health services for local veterans.