

## Rep. Bilirakis Supports Spending Measure Containing Critical Funding for Veterans and Local Initiatives

WASHINGTON (18 Dec.) &ndash; On Monday evening, U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) supported a wide-ranging spending measure to fund the federal government for the remainder of fiscal year 2008.

The \$516 billion omnibus spending bill, which includes eleven separate appropriations measures and will fund 14 Cabinet agencies, was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 253-154.

Congressman Bilirakis was dismayed over the way in which the bill was brought up before the House by the Majority.

"The rules of the House call for Members to have the opportunity to review bills three days prior to voting on them. The Majority allowed us less than 24 hours to pour over a 3,000 page bill weighing more than 40 pounds," said Bilirakis. "Despite this very troubling and partisan effort to blind the rest of us about what we were voting on, I could not and will not vote against critical funding for our nation's veterans or the important provisions contained in the legislation that would directly benefit my constituents."

The bill contained critical funding for veterans \$3.7 billion above President Bush's request, including increases in veterans funding for mental health and substance programs, assistance for homeless veterans, troops transitioning from service in Iraq and medical and prosthetic research.

"There was no way I could vote against this critical veterans funding," said Bilirakis. "We need to ensure that our veterans have the best possible care and benefits, and I believe my support for this legislation makes good on my commitment to put our nation's veterans first."

Also contained in the legislation was more than \$4.1 million in important funding for local initiatives requested by Bilirakis, including \$136,000 for the Plant City Police Department for new digital and computing technology to help in the collection of evidence and to more effectively fight crime.

Two other notable initiatives supported by Bilirakis included nearly \$1 million to upgrade public transportation buses in Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas Counties as well as more than \$500,000 for the University of South Florida's Cancer Clinical Trials project.

This funding is in addition to the more than \$13.7 million Bilirakis also successfully secured in the Fiscal Year 2008 Defense Appropriations bill, which was signed into law last month.