

Rep. Bilirakis Supports Passage of Defense Authorization Act

WASHINGTON (23 May) – On Thursday, U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) supported the passage of a defense authorization bill that would improve the lives of active duty and retired service members, increase military readiness and provide for our warfighters deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), H.R. 5658, authorizes \$601.4 billion to support our national defense, including \$70 billion to support troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, \$2 billion for unfunded readiness initiatives requested by the services and \$153.2 billion to meet the needs of service members and their families. The bill passed by a vote of 384 to 23.

Included in the NDAA was a provision specifically advocated for by Bilirakis that would increase pay for U.S. military personnel by 3.9 percent; one half percent above the President's request. In April, Bilirakis introduced legislation, H.R. 5481, that would guarantee a similar increase.

"I am pleased that, again this year, the House acted to increase military pay at a level that is more competitive with the private sector," said Bilirakis. "Closing this gap, now less than three percent, is critical to ensuring that uniformed services continue to attract and keep quality men and women."

Despite many good provisions included in the NDAA, such as the pay increase, Bilirakis was not pleased that the Majority blocked an effort to repeal the tax levied against widows of deceased service members, also known as the "Widow's Tax."

"The Majority has chosen to deny the widows of our fallen soldiers the benefits promised to them. Those men and women deployed on the battlefield have trusted that their families will be cared for no matter what happens. This is no way to meet that commitment, not to mention the wrong message to send."

A Republican-sponsored amendment that would have immediately repealed the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) - Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset was voted down by the Majority during Committee mark-up earlier this month.