

## Bilirakis Supports Defense Bill with Important Provisions for Troops & Veterans

WASHINGTON -On

Thursday, U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) supported the passage of H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2008. This bipartisan legislation will authorize defense-related funding for the fiscal year 2008; including key provisions specifically advocated by Bilirakis critical to the health and welfare of active duty and retired members of the United States military.

May 18, 2007

WASHINGTON -On

Thursday, U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) supported the passage of H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2008. This bipartisan legislation will authorize defense-related funding for the fiscal year 2008; including key provisions specifically advocated by Bilirakis critical to the health and welfare of active duty and retired members of the United States military.

"This is a strong piece of bipartisan legislation that effectively addresses the needs of our warfighter and veterans," said Bilirakis. "It was important to me that any defense spending bill under consideration makes a substantial effort to improve military health care, boost our soldiers' pay and living conditions, and addresses serious concerns regarding America's retired veterans. The defense authorization bill does just that."

H.R. 1585 works toward

reducing the current military civilian pay disparity by providing America's uniformed men and women with a 3.5 percent pay raise in 2008 and guaranteed pay raises in 2009, 2010 and 2011. In April, Bilirakis introduced H.R. 2027, the Military Pay Improvement Act, which would ensure that the minimum 2008 increase would be 3.5 percent.

"I am glad that my colleagues

on the Armed Services Committee joined with me in supporting this 3.5 percent pay increase," said Bilirakis. "It is important Congress addresses the pay gap between the military and the private sector. This small step is the least we can do, especially during wartime, to ensure that our uniformed men and women are being properly compensated for their sacrifices."

On May 14, The Washington

Times published a letter from the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) thanking Bilirakis for introducing H.R. 2027. "The Fleet Reserve Association (FRA) salutes Rep. Gus Bilirakis, Florida Republican, for introducing legislation to close the pay gap between civilians and enlisted service members," wrote FRA Executive Director Jon Barnes.

A Member of the House

Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Congressman Bilirakis was pleased that H.R. 1585 contained provisions that improve the eligibility of benefits for America's veterans. "I am glad that this bill is continuing to make progress toward

restoring military retired pay," said Bilirakis. "Our veterans served this nation with dedication and sacrifice to ensure our freedom. We owe it to these heroes to provide them with the benefits they are due."

Military retirees are the only group of federal retirees who must waive retirement pay in order to receive VA disability compensation, also known as 'concurrent receipt.' Additionally, many veterans do not qualify for the Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) program because they were forced to medically retire before attaining 20 years of service.

Congressman Bilirakis introduced several bills in the 110th Congress to address the concurrent receipt and CRSC issues. In January, Bilirakis introduced the Combat-Related Special Compensation Act, H.R. 89, which eliminates the 20-year requirement for the CRSC program. Although the NDAA does not go that far, it does provide CRSC compensation to medically retired military personnel with at least 15 years of service and a disability rating of 60 percent or higher.

###