

L.I.'S Veterans Facilities Will Receive Share of \$6.7 Billion Increase in '08



Old Westbury, NY —On Monday, U.S. Representatives Carolyn McCarthy (D-Mineola), Steve Israel (D-Huntington) and Tim Bishop (D- Southampton) joined dozens of Long Island veterans to announce the largest increase to veterans' health care in the VA's history. The Veterans Administration funding bill for 2008 represents an increase of \$6.7 billion from this year in veterans' health care and other programs and \$3.8 billion over President Bush's budget request.

"After fighting to protect our country, veterans should not have to fight to receive the benefits they have been promised," said Congressman Israel, who has restored \$2.6 million in retroactive benefits for veterans in his district and sits on the Appropriations Committee which recommended the increase. "This week, the House made history by passing the largest increase to veterans' health programs since the VA was founded over 77 years ago. This \$6.7 billion increase will not only improve veterans health care, but will also add 1,000 new claims processors to reduce a backlog of 400,000 benefits claims."

"Our veterans are returning home with more serious injuries than in past wars," said McCarthy. "We are seeing a dramatic rise in the number of veterans with brain and head injuries. According to the Brain Injury Association of America, it is estimated that as many as 10% of military personnel deployed in combat zones return home with some form of traumatic brain injury. With passage of the House bill, our veterans will see over \$6 million to improve the treatment and care of traumatic brain injuries. Our veteran's deserve only the best care for their sacrifice and service, and the House bill gives them just that."

“For the first time, this veterans bill would fully fund our promise to care for our military men and women,” said Congressman Bishop. “This means providing them with the financial, physical and psychological support required to transition back into civilian life and then meeting their health care needs for the rest of their lives. This nation made a promise to our troops, and my colleagues and I are determined to keep it.”

The 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Administration Bill provides \$43.2 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, \$6.7 billion above 2007 and \$3.8 billion over the President’s request for veterans medical care, claims processing personnel, and facility improvements.

The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 5.8 million patients in 2008 including more than 263,345 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, 54,000 more than fiscal year 2007. The House-passed bill provides \$29 billion medical service, including a \$600 million for new initiatives to improve treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury.