

## Murphy Supports Historic Increase in Veterans Affairs Budget; House also Passes Homeland Security Funding Bill

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congressman Chris Murphy (CT-5) voted to approve two measures to invest in homeland security and provide the largest single increase to the Veterans Affairs (VA) budget in the 77 year history of the agency. This funding increase will assist the more than 251,000 veterans in Connecticut and soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Since 2003, the number of patients the VA serves for health care needs has increased from 5 million to 5.7 million.

"Today's victory for veterans is historic, but bittersweet because Congress should have been living up to our obligation to our veterans all along. When I was in Iraq and Afghanistan in April, I saw the sacrifice they make every day. They deserve the best medical care while they are abroad, and also when they return home," said Murphy.

An estimated one-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are facing mental health challenges. The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill provides \$600 million more than the President's request for mental health, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and traumatic brain injuries.

Other measures in the 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs bill will:

- Increase the VA budget by \$6.7 billion over last year's allocation.
- Exceed, for the first time, the budget of the veterans' service organizations for medical care by \$294 million. This will ensure quality health care for 5.7 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, which the VA will treat in FY 2008.
- Add 1,100 new claims processors to help to reduce the 400,000 claims backlog for veterans waiting for disability and other benefits.
- Provide funds to begin the process of adding 65,000 Army, 27,000 Marine, and 9,000 National Guard and Reserve troops.

With passage of this bill, the 110th Congress will have voted for historic increases in veterans' health care and benefits programs, totaling nearly \$12 billion, to meet the needs of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and make up for the Bush Administration's past shortcomings in its treatment of veterans.

"We must be able to meet the health care needs of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and with this increase, we can begin to repair some of the shortfalls," said Murphy.

The House of Representatives also passed today the Homeland Security appropriations bill which makes border security a top priority, provides 3,000 additional border patrol agents for the country, provides first responders with additional training and equipment, improves aviation and port security, and includes strong accountability measures in order to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being well spent.

"While the Senate continues to struggle to move a comprehensive immigration bill, today I supported a bill that invests in

enforcing our immigration laws, something that in previous years was talked about, but not acted upon," said Murphy.  
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