

Washington, DC -- Today, U.S Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) met with local veterans and veterans' advocates to update them on recent legislative victories which would improve veterans' services and health care for veterans and returning service members.

"Especially over the July 4th holiday, it is important to highlight the great debt we owe the brave men and women who have served our country," said Arcuri. "Today, I listened to veterans, clinic staff, and citizens committed to providing for our veterans. I heard first-hand what Washington must do to provide for local veterans. In Congress, we have taken concrete steps to provide the Veterans Administration (VA) and clinics like the one here in Rome with the resources needed to best serve local veterans. Two weeks ago, I had the honor to vote for the first funding bill in over two decades that met the Veterans Administration's budget requests. That legislation passed the House by a bipartisan majority, but there is much more to be done to live up to our promise to the nation's veterans."

Arcuri was joined by members of his Veterans Advisory Committee as well as staff from the VA who introduced services offered at the Rome clinic and through the Syracuse VA. Arcuri toured the Rome VA Outpatient Clinic and met with local veterans.

The Rome VA Outpatient Clinic has served 5,724 veterans from Oneida, Herkimer, and Lewis Counties with 23,778 visits in Fiscal Year 2007 to May 30th. In Fiscal Year 2006, 6,242 veterans from the Mohawk Valley used the Rome Clinic, logging 35,088 visits.

In June, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R 2642, the 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill, the largest single increase in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration (VA), providing critical resources for the 1,094,391 veterans in New York State. According to the Syracuse VA, there are currently 20,443 veterans in Oneida County.

H.R. 2642 would provide \$43.2 billion, \$6.7 billion above 2007 and \$3.8 billion over the President's request, for veterans' medical care, claims processing personnel, and facility improvements. Funding in H.R. 2642 would ensure quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including over 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, which the VA will treat in 2008, and add over 1,000 new claims processors to reduce the backlog of 400,000 benefits claims.

“We as Americans must maintain our sacred promise to veterans and service members by providing them with the care they need and the support they deserve,” said Arcuri. “The 110th Congress is committed, on both sides of the aisle, to fulfilling that promise. This is a critical time – as more and more veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan. We have passed legislation for a \$3.4 billion increase in VA funding to provide services to meet rising health care costs and account for the influx of an estimated 219,000 new veterans entering the VA system in 2007.”

H.R. 2642 would provide \$900 million for mental health, PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and make five polytrauma centers and three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) fully operational.

One-third of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan face mental health challenges, and up to 300,000 returning troops are expected to suffer from TBI.

In March, Arcuri voted with a bipartisan majority to pass the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act (H.R. 1538), which would ensure that wounded service members receive the highest quality care as well as increase the efficiency and accountability of the VA health care system. During that month, he also toured the Veterans home in Oxford as well as visited injured servicemen who had just returned from Iraq at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington.

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