

Washington, DC -- Today, the House 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.

“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 when they return home,” said Arcuri. “Today we demonstrated the 110th Congress’s commitment, on both sides of the aisle, to fulfilling that promise. Too often we have been disappointed in the quality of veterans’ health care: from the scandalous conditions at Walter Reed to returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who don’t receive the psychological care they need. In Congress, we have been steadily working to improve the system and today’s bill marks another victory in our fight to provide for our nation’s veterans and service members. ”

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.

“I want to thank Congressman Arcuri and commend the House members for their efforts and continued support of veterans’ issues. Among the items in the bill, the additional allocation of funds for mental health, traumatic brain injury, assistance for homeless veterans, and medical facilities will have a major impact on the care and welfare of local veterans,” said Joe Perrone, Director, Oneida County Veterans Service Agency, and a member of Arcuri’s Veterans Advisory Committee.

All of the major veterans groups strongly endorse H.R. 2642 – including Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Disabled Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, Association of the United States Army, National Association for Uniformed Services, and AMVets.

“It is refreshing to see the passing of a funding bill that improves the quality of health care for our very deserving veterans. Their sacrifices both past and present is what preserves the freedoms that we all cherish. A bill of this magnitude sends a strong message of gratitude to our armed forces,” said Peter Acquaviva, Chairman of Arcuri’s Veterans Advisory Committee.

“In April, I visited the State Veterans’ Home in Oxford where I saw first-hand what local agencies are doing to take care of veterans here in Upstate New York. By providing the VA with adequate funding on a federal level, I know I have done my part to ensure that local agencies have the resources they need to care of our veterans,” said Arcuri.

The bill also fully funds Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process and increases funding for military construction to improve training and quality of life facilities for active duty troops and Members of the Guard and Reserves.

H.R 2642, the 2008 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill includes:

- \$28.9 billion to improve access to medical services for all veterans.
 - o \$3.6 billion to ensure the efficient operation of the Department’s health care system.
 - o \$4.1 billion for on-going maintenance and renovations of existing facilities to address identified shortfalls and to ensure the Department’s facilities remain capable of delivering world class medicine.
- \$600 million for new initiatives for mental health and PTSD, including funding to ensure the five Level I Polytrauma Centers and the three Centers of Excellence for Mental Health and PTSD are fully operational in 2008.
- \$2.9 billion for specialty mental health care and \$429 million for the Substance Abuse Program.

- A minimum of \$15 million, to be used for joint programs with the Department of Defense to increase research, improve access to care, and ensure a more seamless transition for our veterans.

- \$165 million for grants to states for construction and modification of extended care facilities.

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.

In addition to taking care of veterans' health needs, Arcuri helped guide the Small Business Lending Improvements Act (H.R. 1332) through the House in April, which would ensure that returning servicemen and women are afforded every opportunity to start or expand a small business by creating a lending structure to help address the obstacles faced by owners deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

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