

Washington, DC -- U.S. Representative Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) voted today along 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 Veterans' Administration (VA) health care system. "Last month, I had the opportunity to visit with wounded soldiers and young constituents recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center," Arcuri said. "Meeting them face to face and seeing their families struggle to provide the critical care our vets will need for the rest of their lives reminded me that we would all want the absolute best treatment and care for our children – and our brave troops deserve nothing less. The Wounded Warrior Assistance Act ensures that the more than 25,000 service members who have sustained injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan receive the world-class treatment, care, and services they so bravely earned." H.R. 1538 would improve access to quality medical care for wounded service members who are outpatients at military health care facilities. It would also take necessary and concrete steps to end bureaucratic red-tape backlogs and begin the process of restoring integrity and efficiency to the disability evaluation system, and improve the transition of wounded service members from the Armed Forces to the VA.

Last month, Arcuri sent a letter to the General Accountability Office (GAO) Comptroller General requesting an immediate and thorough assessment of the Administration's long term plans for the care of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. Arcuri also spoke on the floor of the House in support of full funding for veterans' health care.

This month, the Government Accountability Office issued a report on its investigation of conditions at VA hospitals and facilities across the country. The review found more than 1,000 reports of substandard conditions, as well as a smaller number of potential threats to patient safety, such as suicide risks in psychiatric wards. The report was undertaken after a series of articles ran in the Washington Post outlining neglect and mismanagement at Walter Reed Army Medical Hospital. The Washington Post reported on moldy rooms, rodent infestations, lost paper work, mismanaged cases, and a host of other instances of neglect regarding care for soldiers recuperating from injuries sustained in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Wounded Warrior Assistance Act would:

- Improve the system of case managers for wounded service members, through decreased case loads and better training, so that service members and their families can get the help they need when they need it.

- Create a system of patient advocates for outpatient wounded service members to ensure that outpatients get the right treatment.
- Require the Department of Defense to establish a toll-free hot line for reporting inadequate care or services and ensure a rapid response to complaints.
- Establish independent medical advocates to serve as counselors and advisors for service members being considered by medical evaluation boards.
- Require the Department of Defense to annually recommend improvements in the training of health care professionals, medical care case managers, and patient advocates to increase their effectiveness.
- Form an Army Wounded Warrior Battalion pilot program, modeled after the Wounded Warrior Regiment program in the Marines, to track active-duty soldiers in “outpatient status” who still require medical care.
- Begin the process of reforming the disability evaluation system to restore efficiency and improve results.
- Improve the transition of wounded service members from the Armed Forces to the VA by creating a formal transition process.

Arcuri's remarks on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in support of H.R. 1538, as prepared for delivery, are attached below:

**U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24)  
In the House of Representatives  
Floor Speech on the Rule Providing for Consideration of H.R. 1538  
March 28, 2007**

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of this rule and the underlying bill, the Wounded Warrior Assistance Act.

Improvements in medical technology over the years allow for more servicemen and women to survive injuries sustained in battle. During World War II, for every soldier killed, two were injured. Now, this ratio is up to sixteen-to-one. These incredible medical developments allow many more men and women to return home to their families, but their injuries tend to be much more serious, and in many cases, require additional care for the rest of their lives. Last month, I had the opportunity to visit with wounded soldiers recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. I met a several young men wounded in Iraq, one a constituent of mine from Upstate New York. As I stood there next to one of the soldier's mother, I saw a look of sadness on her face, and at that point it struck me – what if one of my two teenage children were lying in that bed? I would want the absolute best treatment and care for my children – and our brave troops deserve nothing less.

Sadly, the Administration's mismanagement of the War in Iraq has extended to the home front. The selfless men and women who volunteered to defend their country have been callously neglected, and were not only sent into battle without adequate resources, they also returned home to inadequate resources. And when they asked for help, no one answered.

We make a promise to our soldiers to provide for them when they return from battle. It is absolutely unacceptable that this promise has been broken.

The Wounded Warrior Assistance Act will ensure that the more than 25,000 service members who have sustained injuries in Iraq and Afghanistan receive the world-class treatment, care, and services they so bravely earned. This bill creates an efficient system for the transition of records from the Department of Defense to the Veterans Administration. It establishes a support system of counselors, advocates, and case managers to ensure timely, comprehensive care. And it establishes a number to call to report problems in facilities so that when a soldier asks for help, someone answers.

Mr. Speaker, our men and women in uniform deserve the absolute best care this nation has to offer. I urge my colleagues to renew our promise to our veterans by supporting this rule and the underlying bill.

Thank you, I yield back the balance of my time.

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