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House Passes Legislation for Improved Veterans Medical Care, Quality of Life Funding for Active Duty Members

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Washington, DC - Funding for the Veterans Administration and military construction projects passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in the House last week, announced Congressman Travis Childers (D-MS). The Congressman was one of 409 members who voted for the Military Construction-VA Appropriations Act of 2009 (H.R. 6599).

H.R. 6599 rejects the President's proposal to cut VA construction by nearly \$800 million, continues Congress' work to address critical medical needs facing soldiers as they return from Iraq and Afghanistan, and provides quality of life funding for active duty military men and women for the first time in the last seven years.

"Our men and women who have served to protect the freedoms upon which this country was founded deserve the best care and resources possible," said Congressman Childers. "I am extraordinarily proud to support this incredibly important legislation to ensure the VA has the funding it needs to restore buildings that have fallen into disrepair, guarantee that soldiers serving overseas receive quality medical care upon their return home, and improve active members' quality of life."

"This legislation will provide quality medical care and repaired facilities to the approximately 7,500 veterans living in Mississippi's First District that receive VA benefits. It will also give assistance to the more than 3,000 military service members, Department of Defense civilians, and contractors who live and work at the Columbus Air Force Base."

H.R. 6599 is the first funding bill considered on the House or Senate floor for Fiscal Year 2009. The legislation appropriates a total of \$72.7 billion for VA and military construction projects, roughly \$10 billion above the President's requested funding.

The bill provides \$47.7 billion, for veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements. Recent reports of poor conditions at VA medical facilities and the constant issue of claims backlogs at the VA signal that the Department is in desperate need of funding and overhaul. H.R. 6599 provides funding to refurbish VA medical facilities, add additional workers to assist with processing veterans' claims, and makes important updates to veterans' benefits including travel reimbursements, mental health services, and coverage of Priority 8 veterans.

Congress has also appropriated \$336 million through H.R. 6599 to address quality of life issues that are facing our active

duty military men and women and their families. While the President did not request any such funds, surveyed military personnel continue to cite quality of life as one of their principal concerns while living on military installations. This funding will be used to continue a quality of life initiative for troops and their families, including nearly \$200 million for five new trainee and recruiting housing facilities for the Army and Marine Corps to improve the conditions in which soldiers and marines live in when they train, and \$136 million for medical military construction and planning activities to upgrade substandard medical treatment facilities.

Additionally, the legislation appropriates \$24.8 billion for various military construction projects, including the Department of Defense (DoD) Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) account for base realignments, expansions, and closures that took place in previous years. The funding also covers plans to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps.

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