

May 22, 2007

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) today voted in favor five different bills to expand and improve benefits available to veterans.

"As we prepare to celebrate Memorial Day and honor those who have selflessly served our country in uniform in the past as well as those serving today, I am pleased that the House is taking critical steps to improve and expand the health care services available to veterans," said DeFazio. "How we treat those who have served and are serving will directly impact our ability to find volunteers to protect our country in the future. Too often only lip service is paid to supporting our troops.

The legislation approved today will provide real benefits for our troops and veterans and help ensure they receive the benefits and resources they have earned and deserve when they come home."

The bills approved include:

H.R. 67, the Veterans Outreach Improvement Act, legislation to establish a grant program for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide money to states for outreach activities to veterans and their families about benefits and programs for which they are eligible and to help veterans apply for such benefits and programs.

H.R. 2199, the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Health Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act, legislation to establish new research centers for TBI across the country, a screening program for veterans for TBI, a comprehensive program of long-term care for TBI rehabilitation, a TBI Veterans Health Registry, and a pilot program of mobile VA centers to improve access to veterans' readjustment benefits and mental health services in rural areas. These mobile centers would also help veterans file disability claims.

H.R. 612, the Returning Servicemember VA Health Care Insurance Act, legislation to extend from two years to five years following discharge for a veteran who served in combat during or after the Persian Gulf War to access care through the VA. It also provides three additional years of eligibility for veterans discharged more than five years before the enactment of this bill and who had not been previously enrolled in the VA.

This legislation is necessary to allow those with injuries, such as post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, which might not be readily apparent until years after discharge, from getting treatment for these injuries through the VA.

H.R. 1470, legislation to expand chiropractic care to all veterans' medical centers over the next four years.

H.R. 2239, the Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation Benefits, legislation to extend eligibility for Voc Rehab benefits to current members of the Armed Forces who are hospitalized or are receiving outpatient medical care and have a disability that is likely to result in discharge.

Currently, veterans are not eligible for such services until they have actually been discharged.

In addition, earlier this year, the House of Representatives, with DeFazio's support, rejected the President's proposals to shift more of the cost for care onto the backs of veterans via higher co-payments and annual fees. For fiscal year 2007, Congress boosted funding for veterans programs \$3.6 billion above the 2006 level. And in the budget just adopted by the House for fiscal year 2008, the Democratic leadership included \$3.5 billion (9 percent) more for veterans' services than the President requested.