



Klein, Colleagues Pass Critical Veterans' Bill

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Ron Klein (FL-22) today voted with a bipartisan majority of his colleagues to pass a critical veterans' spending bill, providing much-needed funding to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for Fiscal Year 2009.

The legislation, the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs FY09 Appropriations Bill (H.R. 6599) contains billions of dollars in funding, over and above the President's request, for military construction projects to upgrade sub-standard medical and residential facilities, as well as for Veterans' Affairs programs such as medical care for our service members.

"It is a critical national priority to ensure that our veterans have the highest-quality facilities and services available," Klein said. "It is long past time we started serving those who have served our country. Today's legislation provides the VA with the budget it needs to build state-of-the-art medical and residential facilities for our veterans, and to clear the backlog and efficiently administer the medical programs our returning service members depend on."

Key provisions for South Florida veterans in today's legislation include:

- \$40.8 billion for the Veterans Health Administration for veterans' medical care, a total which is \$1.6 billion over the President's request and \$3.9 billion above 2008 funding levels. The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 5.8 million patients in 2009, including more than 333,275 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. This is 40,000 more patients than were treated in 2008.
- \$3.8 billion for specialty mental health care and \$584 million for substance abuse programs.
- \$336 million to continue a quality of life initiative for troops and their families, including nearly \$200 million for the Army and Marine Corps to improve the barracks soldiers and marines live in while they train and \$136 million to upgrade sub-standard medical treatment facilities.
- \$100 million above the President's request to increase the beneficiary travel reimbursement rate from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile.
- \$400 million, not requested by the President, for moderate-income veterans without service-related disabilities (known as Priority 8 Veterans).
- \$130 million for homeless veterans programs, a total which rejects the President's proposed \$8 million cut to this critical service.