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## **Barrow Applauds Largest Increase in Veterans Health Care in History**

*Congressional Funding For American Veterans Approved by President*

Washington, D.C. – Congressman John Barrow (D-Savannah) hailed the President’s approval yesterday of \$3.7 billion in additional veterans funding provided by Congress. This is the largest single funding increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

“This historic veterans funding bill honors American veterans not just in word but in deed,” said Barrow. “It’s not enough to close the gap between what’s been promised over the years and what’s been delivered, but it’s a big step in the right direction. This historic increase in funding, together with our Wounded Warriors Act reforms, gets us back on the track for America’s veterans. I’m glad that the Bush Administration heeded our calls to devote more resources to veterans health care.”

On December 21, Barrow, along with 45 other Members of Congress, sent a letter to President Bush urging him to “immediately release the \$3.7 billion,” saying “our nation’s veterans deserve to have their Department fully funded.” A copy of that letter is attached to this release.

With this release of funds, the 110th Congress has provided an extra \$6.7 billion over last year, which is the largest single funding increase in the 77-year history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. These funds:

- Strengthen quality health care for 5.8 million patients, including about 263,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans;
- Invests in much-needed maintenance for VA health care facilities and treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury for returning veterans;
- Reduces the backlog of veterans (400,000 claims) waiting for their earned benefits by adding 1,800 new claims processors.

Most veterans receiving VA health care are struggling to get into the middle class, with a median annual income of \$23,000.

This increase won widespread support and praise from America's leading veterans organizations, including the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Military Officers Association of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, AmVets, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, National Association for Uniformed Services, and Disabled American Veterans.

"Improving support for our veterans is one of my top priorities," Barrow added. "On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. And with this national investment, we will begin to fulfill our pledge that we as a nation will leave no veteran behind."

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