

Washington, D.C. - Congressman John Barrow (GA-12) voted today to support our troops and honor our veterans by funding critical veterans health services and the construction of key facilities for training and housing our military. The Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act will strengthen quality health care for more than six million patients - including 419,000 veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill also provides advance funding for veterans health services in 2011, so that veterans' health care funds will not be interrupted in the event of unrelated budget fights in the future.

"So many veterans rely on quality health care services, and this bill makes those services stronger," said Barrow. "It also funds the construction of barracks that define our troops' quality of life. This is the least we can do for the brave men and women who serve our nation. And with advance funding, we make sure that crucial veterans health care services will not get interrupted in the event of future budget standoffs."

The legislation preserves the level of funding for mileage reimbursement that Congressman Barrow won in the last Congress, which is 41.5 cents per mile. Until Congressman Barrow's amendment was adopted in the last Congress, the rate had been frozen at 11 cents per mile for 30 years.

"The rate we're at is much better than it used to be, but it's still not good enough," said Barrow. "It's more than the cost of gas, but not quite at the full cost of wear and tear. I won't be satisfied until veterans get full reimbursement of the total cost of travel."

The legislation also includes improvements in electronic health records and paperless benefits processing to make veterans health care more efficient, additional oversight and auditing of our veterans health care system, and new practices to improve access to care for veterans in rural areas. The bill also invests in mental health services and critical medical and prosthetic research to serve our wounded warriors returning from battle.

The bill also provides funding to construct key facilities for training and housing, addressing the unfunded backlog of barracks for the young men and women entering the service. It also includes funding for the guard and reserve initiative, to recognize the critical contribution made by reserve personnel and address urgent unfunded requirements. It takes additional steps to support the military families who give so much in service to this country - with military child care centers, military family housing, and additional Vets Centers to provide community-based readjustment counseling for veterans and their families.

“Supporting our troops and veterans means taking action to provide for them. I'm grateful for their service and sacrifice, and I wholeheartedly support this legislation to give them the access to services they have earned.”

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