

□ *Authorizes \$7.5 million for rural mobile treatment centers*

Washington, D.C. - The U.S. House successfully passed legislation authored by Rep. Peter Welch to improve health care for rural veterans.

The Traumatic Brain Injury Health Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act of 2007, H.R. 2199, incorporated language from Welch's mobile veterans center bill, H.R. 2226.

The Welch bill establishes a pilot program through the VA to provide counseling, mental health services, benefits outreach, and claims development to veterans through mobile treatment centers. It authorizes \$7.5 million for fiscal 2008 and each subsequent fiscal year. The funding will be directed toward areas like Vermont that have the highest concentration of rural veterans.

"The creation of mobile veterans centers recognizes the unique needs of rural veterans and the disproportionately high number of veterans who live in rural areas like Vermont," said Welch. "My goal is to help the VA be innovative in meeting the real needs of our veterans. By enhancing rural services, more veterans will get the quality care they deserve."

The bill also establishes a program at the VA to screen veterans for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), considered by many to be the signature injury of the current wars.

Welch believes special attention to rural regions is necessary, citing that while 19 percent of the nation lives in rural America, 44 percent of current U.S. military recruits are from rural areas. As a result, a disproportionately high number of veterans- 41 percent- live in rural America.

Steve Woodward of Vermont Vet-to-Vet agreed, stating "This initiative should provide a much needed improvement in veterans' access to services, particularly for veterans living in a rural state like Vermont."

"I commend Peter Welch's commitment to improving care for Vermont's veterans through this initiative," said Dave Morgan, also of Vermont Vet-to-Vet.

Rep. Michael H. Michaud, chairman of the Health Subcommittee Committee on Veterans Affairs wrote to Welch on May 22, "Veteran issues are clearly on the top of your agenda, and I look forward to continuing to work with you to improve the care provided to our veterans and their families."

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In addition to passing the mobile veterans legislation, Welch supported and the House passed a package of legislation to improve benefits and services for America's veterans late yesterday, including:

- **Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act (H.R. 612):** Helps ensure soldiers with mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder that are often not immediately diagnosed are treated by making veterans eligible for health care due to combat service for five years after leaving active duty.
- **Veterans Outreach Improvement Act (H.R. 67):** Allows the VA to partner with state and local governments to reach out to veterans and their families in ensuring they receive the benefits they have earned.
- **Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits Act (H.R. 2239):** Extends eligibility for rehabilitation benefits from the Veterans' Affairs Department.
- **Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act (H.R. 1470):** Requires that chiropractic care and services be provided to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers.

Welch has led the investigation into inadequate care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and successfully amended legislation to improve care for recovering soldiers.