

*Introduces "Veterans' Care Advocate Act" creating ombudsman to improve care for recovering soldiers*

Washington, DC -- Rep. Peter Welch today successfully passed an amendment to the "Wounded Warrior Assistance Act of 2007" to improve health care for recovering soldiers. Welch also introduced his own legislation that will further improve the care given to our injured service members.

"The purpose of my amendment is to help assure that recovering members of our military and their families are made aware of the health care resources that are available to them," said Welch.

It is Welch's first floor amendment as a new member of the House.

"Our government makes a pact with service members that when they return home they will get the care they deserve. Our recovering soldiers deserve the best care possible and they must be informed about what services are available," said Welch.

Welch believes the increased outreach provided by this amendment helps improve the medical care case manager and service member advocate provisions in the House-passed "Wounded Warrior Assistance Act of 2007," H.R. 1538.

The Act, which passed unanimously, creates a new system of case managers, advocates and counselors for wounded service members returning from combat overseas to help them get the care they need and to help navigate the military's health care bureaucracy. The bill also establishes a toll-free hotline for reporting deficiencies in medical facilities, and creates a new system to transfer more efficiently soldiers' medical records from the Defense Department to the Veterans' Affairs (VA) Department.

Welch's amendment does two things to the bill: First, it requires that the Secretary of Defense

conduct outreach to all service members and their families, advising them that the medical care case manager and service member advocate positions are there to help. Second, the amendment ensures that the medical case manager and service member advocate have the resources they need to expeditiously carry out the responsibilities and duties of their position.

Today, Welch also introduced the "Veterans' Care Advocate Act," which would create an ombudsman in each military medical facility to assist in the care and overall well-being of recovering service members.

"The ombudsman will help patients and their families overcome bureaucratic entanglements and ensure they receive the care they need. If the system breaks down, the ombudsman will go to bat on their behalf and cut through the bureaucracy," said Welch.

The legislation also requires regular reporting requirements and oversight on the status of the effectiveness of the ombudsman program.