



2010 Veterans – Military Construction Appropriations Bill (H.R. 3082)

As Passed by the House
July 10, 2009

On July 10, 2009, the House passed the 2010 VA-Milcon appropriations bill (H.R. 3082), which continues the historic investment in veterans health care and services enacted by the democratic-led Congress, and supports two key military construction projects in Connecticut.

Since 2007, Congressman Courtney has worked to provide nearly \$18 billion in additional budget resources to the VA to improve care for our veterans and ensure that veterans, and their families, get the services, benefits and care they have earned.

In addition, as Connecticut's only member of the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Courtney has fought to secure nearly \$80 million for new investment in Naval Submarine Base New London. This funding – which includes key projects just as a new submarine pier, an indoor firing range, a waterfront operations center and the replacement of the Submarine Learning Center (SLC) – have helped to strengthen the base and ensure that is able to continue to support our submarine fleet.

This bill continues this investment, funding Congressman Courtney's request for an additional \$6.6 million to accelerate the construction of a new torpedo magazine from 2012 to 2010.

Summary of the bill

Military Construction:

Provides \$24.6 billion, 8 percent below 2009, for military construction programs.

For Connecticut, the bill funds two military construction priorities requested by Congressman Courtney:

- **MK-48 Torpedo Magazine, Subase New London, \$6.57 million.** Funding will be used to construction a new magazine capable of storing up to 36 MK 48 torpedoes. The FY09 Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP) scheduled this project for 2012; however, acceleration to 2010 is urgently needed to improve SUBASE New London's ability to support the needs of our submarine force. This project will increase the capability of the base to provide direct operation support to attack submarines homeported at the facility, as well as ensure that ordinance handling is done in a safe and efficient way. Congressman Courtney requested this funding.
- **TFI -cNAF BEDDOWN- UPGRADE FACILITIES, Connecticut Air National Guard, \$9.1 million.** Requested funding would be used to build the facilities needed to support the 103rd Airlift Wing's Component Numbered Air Force (cNAF) Air Operations Command Center. This mission, assigned to the 103AW following the removal of their A-10s through the 2005 BRAC process, will engage the CT Air National Guard in high tech, highly-skilled work that will support the planning operations, intelligence, logistics, combat service support, and communications-electronics needs of air combat operations around the globe. While this project is currently planned for 2011, acceleration to 2010 is needed to adequately support the training of personnel to meet the needs of their new mission - and without acceleration, there will be a gap in the 103AW's ability to adequately accomplish this important mission. (requested with Reps. John Larson, Rosa DeLauro, Chris Murphy and Jim Himes)

Department of Veterans Affairs:

H.R. 3082 provides nearly \$109 billion, the same as the President's Request and \$14.5 billion above 2009, for veterans medical care, claims processors, and facility improvements.

To provide quality health care for our 5 million veterans, this bill provides \$53 billion in discretionary funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs for FY 2010 -- \$5.4 billion more than fiscal year 2009 non-emergency appropriations. This year's budget increase is on top of the unprecedented increase of \$17.7 billion provided over the last two years.

Key Provisions of the Bill:

Medical Services: Provides \$34.7 billion, 13 percent above 2009, to improve access to medical services for all veterans. The Veterans Health Administration estimates they will treat more than 6.1 million patients in 2010, including more than 419,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (56,000 more than 2009).

Advanced VA Healthcare Funding: The bill includes \$48.2 billion in advance appropriations for fiscal year 2011 for three medical accounts: medical services,

medical support and compliance, and medical facilities. This is an 8 percent increase over FY 2010 and will provide reliable and timely funding to support the delivery of medical care.

Congressman Courtney cosponsored and voted for the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act (H.R. 1016) to enact two-year advanced appropriations for the VA to ensure the agency can properly plan and care for our veterans. The proposal was included in the Congressional budget resolution and is supported by the Obama administration.

Priority 8 Veterans: Includes \$533 million to expand eligibility for VA health care to an estimated 266,000 non-service-disabled veterans earning more than \$30,000 a year, so-called Priority 8 veterans. The Obama Administration is aiming to enroll 500,000 new Priority 8 veterans in the VA health care system by 2013.

In 2003, the Bush Administration blocked new Priority 8 veterans from entering the VA health system – keeping those who served our nation from accessing the care they deserve. In the 110th Congress, Congressman Courtney cosponsored the Honor Our Commitment to Veterans Act (H.R. 463) to reverse this policy, and helped passed the 2009 veterans funding bill which provided funding for the VA to begin enrolling new Priority 8 veterans. The VA began to reopen health care to these veterans on June 15, 2009.

In addition, on June 11, 2009, Congressman Courtney introduced legislation, the Providing Access to Healthcare (PATH) for Veterans Act (H.R. 2830), to give priority to those veterans who have lost their jobs and their health care as VA enrolls new Priority 8 veterans. This bill will ensure that those veterans most impacted by the economic downturn get the care and help they need – and have earned.

Veterans mileage reimbursement: The bill maintains a 41.5 cents/mile reimbursement rate for veterans who must travel long distances to their VA medical appointments. Congress increased the rate to 28.5 cents/mile for 2008, and 41.5 cents/mile for 2009.

Congressman Courtney has fought to increase veterans mileage reimbursement since 2007 due to the long distances that eastern Connecticut veterans often travel to their medical appointments. In the 110th Congress, he joined Congressman Tim Walz (D-MN) in introducing H.R. 6625, to permanently increase the mileage reimbursement rate.

Working to Reduce Veterans Claims Backlog: Adds roughly 1,200 additional claims processors to continue to work down the backlog of benefits claims and to reduce the time to process new claims. Currently nearly 397,000 veterans' claims are pending.

Assistance for Homeless Vets: Provides \$3.2 billion, 40 percent above 2009, including \$26 million for a Presidential Initiative to combat homelessness, \$150 million for the homeless grants and per diem program, \$20 million for supportive services for low income veterans and families, in addition to \$21 million to hire additional personnel for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program.

Mental Health: Provides \$4.6 billion, \$800 million above 2009, for mental health care – to meet the growing need with troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Medical Facilities: Provides \$1.1 billion to address the backlog in non-recurring maintenance at our medical facilities, in combination with the FY 2009 Supplemental;

Medical and Prosthetic Research: Provides \$580 million for medical and prosthetic research related to veterans health, including a \$48 million increase for research to address the critical needs of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans.

Information Technology: Provides \$3.3 billion, 30 percent above 2009, with new initiatives including paperless benefits processing and improvements in electronic health records.