

## Michaud Announces House Passage of Veterans Bills

Wednesday, September 10 2008

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, Congressman Mike Michaud, Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, announced last evening's House passage of three pieces of legislation affecting veterans. H.R. 1527, the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program to permit certain highly rural veterans enrolled in the health system of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to receive covered health services through providers other than those of the Department. Michaud's Subcommittee on Health held a legislative hearing on H.R. 1527 on April 26, 2007.

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"As a cosponsor of the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, I have worked closely with the sponsor in making sure that this bill becomes a reality," said Michaud. "This pilot program includes the state of Maine and would allow a highly rural veteran who is enrolled in the VA system to elect to receive covered health services through a non-VA health care provider. This is one more step forward in our efforts to increase access to those veterans that live far from VA facilities."

Under the bill, the

definition of a "highly rural veteran" is one who:

- resides more than 60 miles from the nearest VA facility providing primary care services, more than 120 miles from a VA facility providing acute hospital care, or more than 240 miles from a VA facility providing tertiary care (depending on which services the veteran needs); or,
- otherwise experiences such hardships or other difficulties in travel to the nearest appropriate VA facility that such travel is not in the best interest of the veteran.

In addition to the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, the House also passed S. 2617, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living adjustment Act of 2008. S. 2617 ensures that benefits for disabled veterans and certain survivors of veterans increase by the same amount as Social Security benefits. Passage of this bill in the House clears it for the president's signature.

"These benefits are critical for many veterans and their families to help make ends meet," said Michaud. "As veterans face challenges like rising food and energy prices, this cost of living increase is a modest, but welcome, step."

The House also passed H.R. 6832, the Veterans' Programs Extension and Construction Authorization Act of 2008, which authorizes major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009.

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