

12/15/2006 Moran Praises Passage of Veteran Benefit Bill

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Works to Increase Mental Health Care Access, Resolve Claims Backlog

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran this week praised recent Congressional passage of a comprehensive veterans' benefits bill. Moran also this week asked the Administration to address the increasing backlog of pending veterans' claims.

Last week, Congress approved the Veterans Benefits, Health Care and Information Technology Act, which included provisions of a bill Moran introduced to give veterans access to a full range of qualified mental health providers, including Licensed Professional Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists. Previously, only privately insured individuals and active duty personnel - not veterans - had access to this care. The benefits bill also authorizes additional funding for more blind rehabilitation specialists, strengthens support for homeless veterans and increases reimbursements for seriously disabled veterans living in state veterans homes. For rural veterans, the legislation creates a VA Office of Rural Health and allows veterans to access long term care closer to home by making non-VA facilities, such as community hospitals, eligible for state veterans home payments.

"Caring for our nation's veterans must be a priority," Moran said. "With the growing number of veterans seeking mental health services after returning from combat overseas, I am pleased that Congress acted to recognize these practitioners to help veterans access the right care."

Looking ahead to 2007, Moran this week helped lead more than 60 Members of Congress in asking the President to address the increasing backlog of pending veterans' claims in his upcoming federal budget proposal. Since last year, the number of pending compensation and pension claims has increased 17 percent. The letter encourages the Administration to provide the funding for the staff and resources needed to overcome the backlog and delays.

"The hardship experienced by many veterans and their families waiting to have their claim processed is unacceptable," Moran said. "They deserve timely, accurate and consistent decisions from the VA."

Moran is a senior member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and has served as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health.

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