

## Castle Tours Elsmere Veterans Medical Center -- March 12, 2007

WILMINGTON, DE -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle today visited the Elsmere Veterans Medical Center with Veterans Affairs Wilmington Medical Center Director Richard Citron and met with workers and patients throughout his tour.

Castle, who also led a delegation of Members of Congress on a visit to the Walter Reed Army Hospital last Friday to follow up on reports of questionable treatment of soldiers and quality of living conditions, stressed the importance of the high quality of care Delaware veterans receive at Elsmere.

"My tours of the Elsmere Veterans Medical Center and Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington D.C. are invaluable because they shed light on just how important our entire military healthcare system is to our veterans. There is quite an interesting contrast between the two facilities as well," Castle said.

"While the leadership at Walter Reed is currently in the process of fixing the 'bricks and mortar' issues and Congress will soon provide additional funding through an emergency funding bill, the most critical issues at Walter Reed involve the patient care and bureaucracy concerns that allowed these problems to go unanswered for years. However, my visit today in Elsmere reassured me of this facility's commitment to serving our nation's veterans. It is obvious that the Veterans Center here is well ahead of the curve in terms of its level of care and service.

"The many problems that have surrounded Walter Reed make it clear that we need to improve oversight of taxpayer dollars to ensure military funding goes where it is needed most. In many cases, waste and abuse are the result when advisers at the Pentagon have financial conflicts of interest, which sway their funding recommendations. For this reason, I am planning to introduce legislation that will ensure that decision-makers at the Pentagon are making the right decisions when it comes to spending taxpayer dollars," Castle said.

Castle's legislation, which he will likely offer as an amendment this week on a government conflicts of interest bill, will require better ethical standards for contractors and government employees to prevent waste and make certain that vital military funding goes where it is needed most -- to protect those serving in harm's way and provide quality care for our wounded soldiers and their families.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates the largest healthcare system in the country, treating patients at over 1,400 sites - including 154 hospitals and more than 800 outpatient clinics and 135 nursing homes. President Bush has proposed increasing the VA's budget to \$87 billion in 2008 and Congressman Castle outlined that he intends to work closely with Democrats and Republicans to make certain this funding goes where it is needed most. The Delaware Commission on Veterans Affairs was established in 1987 during Congressman Castle's term as Governor.

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