

CASTLE HELPS HOUSE PASS DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT -- DECEMBER 12, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Meredith Sullivan

December 12, 2007

202-225-4165

CASTLE HELPS HOUSE PASS DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT,

INCLUDES CASTLE PROVISION FOR ETHICAL DEFENSE CONTACTING

Rep. Castle says bill does not do enough to provide adequate leave time for soldiers returning from combat zones

Washington, D.C. -- Delaware Congressman Mike Castle voted in favor of H.R. 1585, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. The legislation authorizes \$696.3 billion for defense programs, including funding for additional protection of U.S. troops in Iraq, a 3.5% pay raise for military personnel, extended discounted benefits under the military's Tricare health network, National Guard and Reserve equipment, and emergency supplemental funds for Iraq and Afghanistan among others. Aside from these authorizations, the bill also includes Rep. Castle's provision requiring the Comptroller General to investigate the internal ethics compliance programs of major defense contractors. In light of recent problems regarding defense contractors, the provision will examine the extent to which current internal ethics programs ensure proper transparency and accountability.

However, Rep. Castle was disappointed that the legislation did not contain his amendment granting extra leave time to troops returning from combat zones. Current Pentagon policies give all members of the Armed Forces, including those serving in the Guard and Reserve, 2.5 days of leave time (vacation) for every month -- regardless of whether they were deployed in a combat zone or at their home base in the U.S. Rep. Castle's amendment would have credited troops one additional day of leave time for every month that they are deployed in a combat zone.

"The purpose of my amendment was to provide returning troops with adequate vacation time to spend with family and friends as well as time for mental recovery," Rep. Castle said. "Experts have said this time is vital for their recuperation, and I am disappointed it was not included in the legislation. While the bill allows extra leave time in lieu of special pay or other benefits, my goal was to provide this as an additional benefit to honor the sacrifices of our brave men and women. I

think the omission of my provision is unacceptable, and I intend to continue my efforts to see this provision through next year.

"Despite Congress' failure to provide extra leave time for soldiers, I was pleased that Delaware military construction projects were authorized in the legislation. The bill authorizes \$17.5 million for military construction projects at Dover Air Force Base and \$10.8 million for military construction projects at the Delaware Air National Guard's New Castle County Airport base, including construction of a new C-130 hangar. The authorization of these funds will help to keep Delaware moving forward with having adequate facilities at both Dover Air Force Base and the Delaware National Guard."

Specifically, H.R. 1585 authorizes:

- \$184.9 billion in emergency supplemental funds, which are authorized specifically to support operations in Iraq and Afghanistan among others;
- \$26.9 billion to provide additional protection of U.S. troops in Iraq;
- Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles (\$17.6 billion);
- Up-armored Humvees (\$3.3 billion);
- Personal body armor (\$1.2 billion); and
- Improvised explosive device (IED) jammers (\$4.8 billion).

- Extended discounted benefits under the military's Tricare health network to almost all reservists;

- 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.

- 3.5% military pay raise, which extends certain special pay and bonuses for active duty and reserve personnel;
- Nearly \$15 billion for F-22 Raptor, F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, FA-18, and C-17 aircraft;

- \$6.7 billion for National Guard and Reserve equipment; and
- Almost \$10 billion for DD(X) assault ship, new attack submarines, and other major navy vessels.

###