

Testimony for National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014
Congressman Gus M. Bilirakis (FL-12)
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Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith, thank you for taking the time to solicit and consider the testimonies of you fellow members of Congress as you begin considering the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014. The United States' Armed Services are the preeminent military forces in the world and this bill is crucial for the safety and security of American citizens.

As the Vice-Chair of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I am constantly in awe of the members of our Armed Forces and their work as they protect the freedoms that Americans enjoy. It is critical that we support these men and women and their families while they serve and I support military pay raises that take into account inflation and maintain living standards.

There are two pieces of legislation that I have introduced and believe should be taken into consideration by the Committee. The first is H.R. 164, "To amend title 10, United States Code, to permit veterans who have a service-connected, permanent disability rated as total to travel on military aircraft in the same manner and to the same extent as retired members of the Armed Forces entitled to such travel." This legislation would allow veterans with service related disabilities rated as "total" to utilize no-cost, space-available travel on DoD aircraft. These veterans have bravely served our country and have made enormous personal sacrifices that follow them in their daily lives.

Space-A travel is a program that allows for active duty service members and certain others to fill empty seats on scheduled DoD flights. While active duty members and their families will remain the primary beneficiaries of this program in order to assist them with the rigors of military life, H.R. 164 will allow the pool of potential passengers to now include veterans who were permanently disabled while serving their country, and is supported by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the National Federation of the Blind.

The second piece of legislation seeks to honor military divers who have bravely served our country in a number of specialties, including combat diving, rescue operations, salvage, harbor clearing, and ordinance disposal, among other significant diving disciplines. H.R. 165 authorizes the Secretary of the Navy to designate an appropriate site at the former Navy Dive School at the Washington Navy Yard for a memorial to honor the members of the Armed Forces who have served as divers and whose service in defense of the United States has been carried out beneath the waters of the world. The legislation specifies that the memorial is to be paid for with private funds and retains the authority to approve the design and site of the memorial with the Secretary of the Navy. H.R. 165 builds upon the sense of Congress expressed in section 2855 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 that the Secretary of the Navy may permit such a memorial to be built. I urge the committee to build on its sense last year so that we might demonstrate our nation's gratitude to this special segment of heroes, both past and present.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

