



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Contact: [Creighton Welch](mailto:Creighton.Welch@house.gov) (202) 225-5755

WASHINGTON (August 17, 2010) – Because of his continued support for the nation’s military, veterans and military families, Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) was honored Tuesday with the L. Mendel Rivers Award of Excellence from the Air Force Sergeants Association.

"There are many things that make our nation so great, but it is our strong and valiant military that is the backbone of this country," Bilirakis said. "The strength, courage, and dedication of the men and women in uniform keep us safe at home from threats abroad and allow us to remain a free and prosperous nation."

The AFSA has represented soldiers on Capitol Hill since 1961. Today, the association has 120,000 members and 142 active chapters around the world. The L. Mendel Rivers Award of Excellence, named in honor of the former Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee during the Vietnam War, is presented each year to a member of Congress that has focused on the quality of life and benefits of service for members of the military, their families, retirees, and veterans.

"The Air Force Sergeants Association is an extremely respected association on Capitol Hill, so I'm very grateful and humbled to be honored with this award," Bilirakis said. "As a member of Congress, I feel strongly that one of my top duties is to work with the military and provide them with the resources and the benefits that they need and deserve. I strive to be a voice for the military and for veterans on Capitol Hill."

Bilirakis joins a prestigious group of congressmen who have been recognized with this honor, including his father, former congressman and Air Force Staff Sergeant Michael Bilirakis.

"I am deeply humbled to receive this magnificent award," Bilirakis said. "However, I believe all servicemembers, veterans and their families deserve to be honored for their service to our country, and to that end, I think everyone here shares in this honor."

Since coming to Congress in 2007, Bilirakis, a member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, has advocated for military rights and benefits. He has proposed legislation such as: Providing free monthly coupons for charities and military families to ship care packages to our troops stationed abroad; Assisting current and former servicemembers with a tax credit for buying a home; And establishing a mail-order pharmacy pilot program for TRICARE beneficiaries. He also has been an advocate for improved healthcare benefits for the military and veterans, programs that help veterans establish small businesses, and better compensation and tax incentives for soldiers.

The AFSA presented the award to Bilirakis at the group's annual convention in Atlanta.

###

[bilirakis.house.gov](http://bilirakis.house.gov)



**Creighton Welch**

Press Secretary

Congressman Gus Bilirakis (FL-09)

1124 Longworth HOB

(202) 225-5755