

## TCPalm: Mahoney touts increased mileage reimbursement for veterans traveling for medical care

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Published August 4, 2008

STUART- Congressman Tim Mahoney mixed with several generations of veterans in Stuart on Monday when he announced an increased medical mileage reimbursement for veterans that local advocates said will make a huge difference for those dealing with climbing gas prices.

By a vote of 409-4 on Friday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill, which, among other things, increased veterans' mileage reimbursement for medical appointments from 28.5 cents to 48 cents.

Mahoney met with several Veterans Affairs officials Monday morning and toured the Stuart Veterans Clinic on Willoughby Boulevard.

Although 19 cents per mile might not seem significant to some, clinic administrator Patricia Foster said the increase would help many veterans get the treatment they need in an era of spiking gas prices.

"We hear it here all the time," Foster said. "It's going to be a big help when transportation is needed to get to specialists or when they have to drive to (the VA hospital in) West Palm Beach.

Mahoney said there is still much to do for the growing number of U.S. veterans returning from campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"It's still a shame. If you work for the President, I think you get 58 cents (per mile), Mahoney said.

"These people, the clinics and the hospitals, are the tip of the spear. My concern is that the money is coming through the bureaucracy and getting here."

Accompanying Mahoney for the tour, Dr. Darin Rubin, West Palm Beach VA chief for primary care, said the VA's current focus is to maintain funding for specialists to treat returning vets.

"We are seeing a lot of traumatic brain injuries from this war," Rubin said. "That requires us to beef up care in memory therapy, cognitive and occupational therapies, psychology and mental health."

Rubin said the increased number of female veterans has created a large demand for women's health specialists as well.

"We don't want to get into a position of playing catch-up," Rubin said.