

*October 18, 2010*

Pleasanton, CA – Congressman Jerry McNerney (CA-11) and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki toured the Livermore VA hospital today and hosted a roundtable discussion with local veterans. The roundtable discussion highlighted issues affecting the new generation of veterans returning home from conflict, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and the need for educational benefits.

“Improving care and benefits for the men and women who have served our country is a top priority for me,” said Rep. McNerney. “That’s why I invited the Secretary of Veterans of Affairs to meet with local veterans and discuss issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries and the availability of educational benefits. With a new generation of veterans returning home, it’s critical that we address their needs and work to improve medical care and access to benefits.”

Participants in today’s roundtable included Ryan Sykes, a U.S. Navy veteran, who completed 2 tours in Iraq and 5 tours in Afghanistan and experienced severe traumatic brain injuries following a vehicle crash in Iraq. Ryan is a scholarship recipient from Sentinels of Freedom, a local organization that provides severely injured veterans with life scholarships, job placement and mentoring assistance. He lives in San Ramon.

“It means a lot to me as a veteran who recently returned home and am dealing with severe injuries that I would have the opportunity to speak directly to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs about my experiences,” said Ryan Sykes. “I appreciate that Congressman McNerney organized this meeting and gave me the chance to share my thoughts about how veterans like me can be better served. I’m looking forward to continuing to work with Congressman McNerney on issues like improving care for veterans with traumatic brain injuries.”

Kyle Braun, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq, also participated in today’s roundtable discussion. Kyle, a native of Pleasanton, is currently studying at Las Positas College and majoring in Business Administration. He is using benefits made available from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill to attend Las Positas College.

“When I returned home from serving in Iraq, the G.I. Bill gave me the opportunity to go to college,” said Kyle Braun. “Because of these benefits, I’m a student at Las Positas College and am working on getting a degree in Business Administration. I appreciate Congressman

McNerney's support for educational benefits for veterans and the opportunity today to speak directly to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs about my experiences."

Congressman McNerney, a strong advocate for veterans' issues, wrote a new law to improve care for veterans with traumatic brain injuries. He has also fought to keep the Livermore VA in veterans' hands and helped deliver a new VA medical facility to San Joaquin County. Congressman McNerney previously brought both of these issues to the Secretary's attention. Federal regulations, however, prohibited Secretary Shinseki from addressing any pending facility decisions during his visit.