

## Veterans

There are few obligations more sacred than our duty to adequately care for returning and retired servicemen and women. These brave Americans have devoted their lives to the safety of our nation and the protection of its citizens. The way in which we care for them during and upon the completion of their service says everything about the type of nation we strive to be.

I came to Congress determined to challenge the deeply troubling status quo. So in 2007, I helped Congress pass the largest increase in veterans' funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration (VA). This increased funding is vitally important as Congress fulfills its commitment to providing veterans quality accessible healthcare and ensuring more effective administration of services. I know that for many veterans the difficulty of accessing VA clinics and hospitals is a major impediment to receiving the healthcare they earned. Backlogs and endless red tape in everything from disability claims to pension awards rob our veterans of the services and benefits they deserve, and I'm committed to correcting these long-standing wrongs.

As we care for the physical needs of our returning soldiers, we must also care for their educational and career needs. A generation of returning World War II veterans took advantage of the "GI Bill" to attend college and help support new families, ushering in decades of economic prosperity for this nation.

In that spirit, I helped pass the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act, commonly referred to as "the new G.I. Bill". This legislation will make an historic investment in our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans by providing an educational benefit that fully covers the cost of college. While the previous GI Bill only covered up to \$1,000 per month benefits, our new law covers the full cost of tuition and fees at the most expensive public school in a veterans' state. It also provides a yearly book stipend and a monthly living stipend so that veterans do not need to seek supplemental employment. The renewal of this historic compact with our veterans has been overdue for decades, and I was proud to finally pass it into law. Our men and women in uniform simply deserve no less.

But we need to do more than just increase funding and expand benefits - we need to be ever vigilant in dealing with the less-visible costs of service in the armed forces. As a member of the Congressional Brain Injury Caucus, I'm working with President Obama to care for our returning vets, removing the stigma of complex brain injuries, helping veterans cope with conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and reducing the number of suicides associated with these afflictions.

"Hero" is an overused word in our world, but for our veterans, few other words suffice. Their sacrifice and love of country honor all of us.

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