



Veterans Affairs

Congress is failing our veterans. As a veteran who gets my health care from the VA, I see it firsthand. We have never had fewer veterans in Congress in our nation's history, so it's not surprising that so few Members of Congress understand the urgency of the problem. With the right leadership, we can begin to address the systemic problems with veterans care and give our veterans the quality of care they have earned and deserve.

There are two priorities we can and should set today:

- 1. Improve VA health care access and quality, especially for those suffering from post-traumatic stress (PTS), by dramatically increasing funding for mental health care and streamlining the VA claims approval process.**
- 2. Expand opportunities in the GI Bill to include increased civilian job training and homelessness initiatives.**

Overview

Supporting our veterans is not an option - it is our duty. And it shouldn't be a partisan issue. We owe it to the men and women in uniform to provide them with the necessary health care, job opportunities, and long-term treatment they have earned. In Congress, I will take legislative action to protect the rights of veterans and actively work to streamline the Veterans Administration (VA) to ensure we deliver benefits promptly and efficiently to all veterans. Just throwing money at the VA won't fix the problem; we need to fundamentally reform the VA bureaucracy as well.

The care our veterans are receiving is unacceptable, and we must address this issue immediately. While I support the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 as a step in the right direction, more can be done to ensure the health and wellbeing of our veterans. The VA has an annual budget of \$163.9 billion, yet our veterans continually suffer from restrictive treatment options, high unemployment, suicide, and homelessness.

We can do better.



I offer a two-pronged approach to target the most pressing issues facing veterans today: health care and post-service employment options.

Health Care

Long wait times, claims backlogs, and inadequate VA technology systems create an environment where veterans are falling through the cracks. Rather than simply throw more money at the existing system, we need to reform the system to better serve today's veterans. VA claims from World War I peaked in 1969, so the system was built to serve a different generation of veterans. There are three places we should start:

- 1) Increase mental health appropriations - currently at \$7.2B – for more counselors, further research, and implementation of holistic treatments for veterans with post-traumatic stress (PTS).
- 2) Streamline the VA claims approval process cutting the bureaucracy, expediting the appeals process, and providing health care access while claims are adjudicated through bureaucratic fixes and increase veterans' choice when choosing a health care provider, including VA-sponsored or private providers for those veterans in underserved regions, to reduce the benefit claims backlogs, and improve the quality of care.
- 3) Ensure access to private care alternatives for veterans in under-served regions so that veterans always receive the best health care available, and continue funding for our world-class, VA-run, prosthetic research and development programs. I will oppose resolutions, like H.J. Res. 72, that would reduce or eliminate appropriations for such efforts.



Veterans Employment

Taking care of veterans is not limited to health care. In order to provide a comprehensive overhaul of veterans' benefits, we need to more closely examine how veterans are integrated back into civilian life.

There are three key areas where we can increase funding and development that will have an outsized impact on our veterans:

- 1) Make the transition to civilian life easier by ensuring that military-trained professionals receive the proper licenses, academic credit, or credentials for the training and work they do in the military.
- 2) Allocate additional funding to expand veteran job-training programs, like VETS, which aid veterans in the transition from military to civilian careers, while augmenting the Post-9/11 GI Bill to prevent for-profit colleges from preying on veterans.
- 3) Fight veteran homelessness and reduce veteran suicide rates at their source by providing adequate employment and mental health counseling programs that encourage veterans to find jobs.

We have never had fewer veterans in Congress in our nation's history, so it's not surprising that so few Members of Congress understand the urgency of the crisis. We can't solve these problems overnight, but with the right leadership we can begin to fix the system and give veterans the opportunities they have earned. It's good for veterans, it's good for our country, and it's the right thing to do.