



VETERANS DAY

SALUTING AMERICA'S HEROES



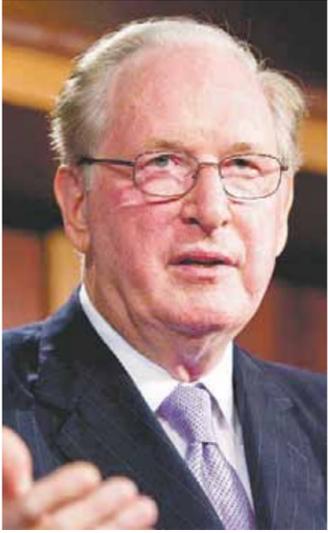
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Protecting Our Service Members And Veterans From Abusive Financial Practices At Home



Senator Jay Rockefeller
(D-WV)
Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

On Veterans' Day, we pay particularly close attention to the men and women who make extraordinary sacrifices to defend our nation. We honor their service to our country and remember those no longer with us. But on every other

day of the year, service members face the same financial decisions that other consumers face. They purchase homes, finance cars, and take out lines of credit to buy computers and other things for their families.

Unlike the rest of us, though, our service members face these decisions under entirely different conditions that we can barely imagine. They move frequently, sometimes with very little notice, and perform their jobs in dangerous war zones for months at a time. These conditions pose significant challenges, but imagine adding to this stress a dispute with a credit card company, or receiving harassing letters from a debt collector while living in a war zone.

One of the basic promises we make to our soldiers is that when you make these extraordinary sacrifices, we will protect you on the home front. To that end, federal law provides consumer protections for the military and their families - it bans certain kinds of predatory loans, places caps on the interest rate that can be charged on credit cards. We've given active service members the ability to cancel apartment and car leases, and made it more difficult for banks and other lenders to foreclose on their homes.

Despite these legal protections, members of the military are still ripe targets

for abusive financial practices. Many soldiers are young and inexperienced with their finances, and living on a military base in foreign country makes it difficult to shop for the insurance rates. Plus, the steady government paychecks of soldiers, as well as the pension income of retired veterans, are opportunities for aggressive lenders looking to make a quick buck.

Since I have been chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, my priority has been to protect consumers. I've kept a close eye on unscrupulous businesses and con artists trying to deprive Americans of their hard-earned money. One case that we uncovered in 2011, exposed major lenders that sent active duty soldiers illegal foreclosure notices and overcharges on their mortgages. Military service members have had their credit cards improperly cancelled and, while abroad serving our country, some families have received harassing phone calls from debt collectors.

Last year, Rep. Elijah Cummings and I convened a forum to get to the bottom of these unlawful schemes. We heard stories about enlisted officers in Iraq, performing some of the toughest jobs in a war zone, who had to stop their mission to take care of their family back home. Putting a full twelve hours in as a soldier, and then spending every spare moment

on hold with a bank, is incredibly taxing both physically and mentally. It's unfair and wrong to put our soldiers in this position. And, it's why Rep. Cummings and I introduced legislation to give soldiers a reprieve from foreclosure while deployed, with increased penalties for mortgage lenders if they violated the law.

Sadly, since our forum last year, service members have continued to be bombarded with these schemes. Websites catering to the military advertise loans that can be made online. But some of these loans have triple-digit interest rates and high fees that make it virtually impossible for soldiers to pay them back on time.

I've also heard troubling stories about debt collectors that call threatening to go to the soldier's supervisor unless the debt is paid. They raise the specter of damaging the soldier's financial record he needs to meet security clearance requirements and keep his job. Granted, sometimes these debts are legitimate, but other times the bill collector doesn't provide any information about the source of the debt, how old it is or even whether it was already paid.

Soldiers should be able to focus entirely on the mission they were sent to accomplish. They shouldn't have to deal with abusive behavior from aggressive

bill collectors, eviction from an apartment while abroad, or the emotional and time consuming toll of having a family deal with home foreclosure. This is why I continue to work hard to protect our men and women in uniform. They're consumers just like the rest of us, and the law gives them protections. So in the coming weeks, I plan to take a closer look at abusive financial practices affecting our service members.

Our active duty and retired service members deserve our nation's respect. For those who aren't being treated with the dignity that they so rightfully earned, rest assured that I will never back down from the fight to uphold the promise to protect all of our soldiers and veterans at home.



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The Gift Of Family: We Owe Them Nothing Less



Senator Patty Murray
(D-WA)
Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

With the changing nature of America's conflicts overseas and the brutal impact of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), we are now seeing more and more servicemembers who got out of their armored vehicle, were sent on foot patrol, and were suffering

reproductive, spinal cord, and other injuries from these weapons of war. In fact, Department of Defense data shows that between 2003 and 2013 more than 2,000 servicemembers have suffered reproductive and urinary tract trauma.

Now, thanks to modern medicine, many of these servicemembers are being kept alive and returning home. And like so many of our veterans, these men and women come home looking to return to their lives, to find employment, and so often to start a family. Yet what they find when they go to the VA is that the fertility services available don't meet their complex needs. In fact, veterans suffering from these injuries find that the VA is specifically barred from providing more advanced assisted reproduction techniques such as in vitro fertilization (IVF). They are told that despite the fact they have made such an extreme sacrifice for our nation we cannot provide them with the medical services they need to start a family.

Veterans like Staff Sergeant Matt Keil, and his wife Tracy, know this heartbreaking predicament all too well. Staff Sergeant Keil was shot in the neck while on patrol in Iraq in 2007, just 6 weeks after he married the love of his life. The bullet went through the right side of his neck, hit a major artery, went through his spinal cord, and

exited through his left shoulder blade. Staff Sergeant Keil instantly became a quadriplegic.

Doctors informed Tracy her husband would be on a ventilator for the rest of his life, and would never move his arms or legs. But Staff Sergeant Keil eventually defied the odds and found himself off the ventilator and beginning the long journey of physical rehabilitation. In fact, Tracy and her husband even started exploring the possibilities of starting a family together.

Having children was all they could talk about, once they adjusted to their new normal. With Staff Sergeant Keil's injuries preventing him from having children naturally, Tracy turned to the VA and began to explore her options for fertility treatments. But because of the VA ban, she was turned away. Out of options, the Keils decided this was important enough that they were willing to pay out-of-pocket to the tune of almost \$32,000 per round of treatment. Thankfully, on November 9, 2010, just two days before Veterans Day, they welcomed their twins Matthew and Faith into the world.

While the Keil's story had a happy ending, it's unconscionable to think our nation's heroes have to spend tens of thousands of dollars in the private sector to get the advanced reproductive

treatments they need to start a family. They should not have to watch as their marriages are frayed by the stress of infertility, in combination with the stresses of readjusting to life after severe injury. Any servicemember who sustains this type of serious injury deserves so much more.

Knowing the Keil's were far from the only ones struggling with this predicament, last Congress, as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I introduced the Women Veterans and Other Health Care Improvements Act. It was commonsense legislation that came very close to becoming law late last year. In fact, with Tracy Keil watching from the gallery, the Senate unanimously passed this legislation. Unfortunately, the House of Representatives refused to take up and pass this bill, time ran out, and we were unable to get it to the President's desk. However, this effort is far from over. This was the very first piece of legislation I introduced this Congress and there has been excellent momentum to get it done.

This bill is about giving these heroes every option others have to help them fulfill the simple dream of starting a family. It says that we are not turning our back on the catastrophic reproductive wounds that have become a

signature of these wars. Our women veterans deserve this, our male veterans deserve this, and our military and veteran families deserve this. We owe them nothing less and on this Veterans Day I call on my colleagues to join me in making this issue a priority when it comes to fulfilling our promises to our nation's heroes.

During her testimony before the committee, Tracy told me, "The day we had our children something changed in both of us. This is exactly what we had always wanted, our dreams had arrived. The VA, Congress and the American people have said countless times that they want to do everything they can to support my husband or make him feel whole again and this is your chance."



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"The Nation Which Forgets Its Defenders Will Be Itself Forgotten" - Calvin Coolidge



Gary Sinise
Actor & Veterans Advocate
Gary Sinise Foundation

So, there I stood, holding my bass guitar and preparing to rock out in front of a huge crowd. But how did I get here? How did a kid from Chicago who was driven to be an actor find himself fronting a rock band in front of eight thousand people? And these weren't just any people. These were wounded

veterans, their families, and caregivers. And this wasn't an ordinary concert. This was an Invincible Spirit Festival, a traveling event designed by my Gary Sinise Foundation in partnership with Sysco and celebrity chef Robert Irvine as a reminder of hope and positivity for those on the road to recovery at military hospitals across the United States. My Lt. Dan Band may have been born in name from a character I played in a movie, but its true purpose came in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

At a young age, with veterans in my family, I was aware of those who serve our great country but, while I couldn't quite grasp its impact, I recall news reports of the Vietnam War and it wasn't until I got a bit older that I realized how badly our Vietnam veterans had been mistreated when they came home. Later, as I was preparing to direct a Vietnam themed play at Stepwolf Theatre in Chicago, I talked to Vietnam veterans and remember the indelible mark it left when they spoke of how they were made to feel ashamed to wear their uniform in public. My wife Moira's two brothers, who had served in Vietnam, would also share their experiences with me. In 1994, I would go on to play the role of Vietnam veteran Lt. Dan Taylor in Forrest Gump, an experience that would lead me to years of service to our nation's

defenders and those who, like Lt. Dan, had been injured in battle. Yes, I was just an actor playing a wounded veteran, but after being honored by the Disabled American Veterans for my performance I realized I was now someone they connected with. And after the attacks on 9/11, I would follow a path towards something even more meaningful as my job as an actor would allow me the ability to bring attention to, and give back to, those who protect our freedom.

Suddenly, my life was filled with USO tours at home and abroad - visits that would be the launching pad for the Lt. Dan Band and allow me to bring a little bit of home to our troops. I would visit our military hospitals to meet with the wounded. If I wasn't on set filming CSI:NY, I was traveling to do my part to show service members that the shameful treatment our returning Vietnam veterans received would never happen again. Instead they would be thanked, raised up, and assisted if necessary. With the belief that we can always do more, I started the Gary Sinise Foundation with one simple mission, to serve our nation by honoring our defenders, veterans, first responders, their families, and those in need. We do this by creating and supporting unique programs that entertain, educate, inspire, strengthen,

and build communities.

Our R.I.S.E. initiative (Restoring Independence and Supporting Empowerment) is dedicated to wounded heroes and their families as they adjust to life post-injury. The flagship of this program is our custom Smart Home building project for severely wounded veterans. Each home is customized to ease their daily challenges and help restore independence with features like retractable cook tops, cabinets and shelving, elevators and more, all accessible via an iPad.

One million veterans are expected to transition into civilian careers over the next five years. These veterans are a great resource for the manufacturing industry, where 82 percent of employers report a shortage of skilled job applicants. By partnering with the Get Skills to Work coalition founded last year by GE, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Alcoa and The Manufacturing Institute we're helping veterans and bridging the manufacturing skills gap, and have grown to include more than 190 partners. The coalition helps veterans translate military skills and experiences into manufacturing careers by accelerating skills training, matching military skills with manufacturing jobs, and helping employers recruit and mentor veterans. Programs like these are crucial to helping our nation's

heroes and illustrates how employers, industry leaders, educators and the public sector can come together to make a difference.

George Washington spoke of America's responsibility to her disabled veterans. He said, "It is more than a common debt, it is a debt of honor". I believe part of that debt is memorializing the service and sacrifice of our wounded, which is why I'm the spokesperson for The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial. Now under construction in Washington DC, this memorial will provide a permanent place of honor for those who have given so much to protect our freedoms.

It has been a privilege to support our nation's defenders over the years, and today, Veterans Day 2013, I encourage my fellow Americans to never forget and help to improve the lives of our veterans every day.



GARY SINISE
FOUNDATION
SERVING HONOR AND NEED

Coloradans Honor A Forgotten Hero From The Second World War



Representative Doug Lamborn (R-CO)
Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

Among the heroes I look up to are our nation's veterans. That is why it is especially gratifying to introduce a bill in Congress to honor one of those veterans. A nominating committee in my hometown of Colorado Springs unanimously recommended naming a new Veterans Affairs clinic in our city after a largely forgotten hero, Private First Class Floyd Kenneth Lindstrom.

Floyd earned a Congressional Medal of Honor for his extraordinary bravery in the Second World War, but was killed in action before he could accept the honor. He left behind a mother and sister, but never married and today has no known living relatives. His story has gone largely untold, until now.

Floyd Lindstrom was part of the country's Greatest Generation. He was born into poverty in a small town in Nebraska in 1912. Not long after he was born, Floyd's mother brought him and his older sister to Colorado Springs where she had family. She soon got a

job at the Myron Stratton home for indigent children. For the next 16 years she and her two children lived at the Stratton home. Floyd grew up playing basketball and was active in the Boy Scouts. In high school he worked as a soda jerk. He graduated from Cheyenne Mountain High School in 1931.

After high school, Floyd found work as a long haul driver bringing fruit and produce to and from California. His boss described Floyd as "absolutely dependable." He was said to be on time at each and every stop. Even more, his boss said not a fender of the trucks he drove was ever scratched.

One June 22, 1942, the day after turning 30, Floyd enlisted in the U.S. Army. After training to become a machine gunner, he served in North Africa before shipping out for Sicily and Italy.

While in Italy, Floyd earned the Medal of Honor for his "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity." He singlehandedly defeated a German

counterattack on November 11, 1943 on a hill near Mignano, Italy. His citation notes that "Lindstrom demonstrated aggressive spirit and complete fearlessness in the face of almost certain death."

When the Army notified Floyd of his nomination, they offered him the chance to stay back in relative safety as guard detail in Naples. He chose instead to remain with his buddies.

Floyd was killed in action in Anzio, Germany just three months later on February 3, 1944. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously.

His body was interred in the U.S. Military Cemetery, Nettuno, Italy before being returned to his family in Colorado Springs.

A family friend said Lindstrom did not have "a weak link in his make up." Like so many of his generation, he experienced hardship and adversity. With courage and grit he overcame both.

It is a tremendous honor to recognize Floyd and give his memory some small measure of our gratitude for what he did for our nation. It is because of men like Floyd that we remain a free people today.

Congressman Lamborn represents the Fifth District of Colorado and serves on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.



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Our Newest Veterans



Sloan Gibson
CEO & President
USO

Not long ago, I received an email from a Special Forces soldier stationed

at a forward operating base in Afghanistan. He was thanking the USO for a shipment of video games, laptop computers, movies and snacks. He and his fellow soldiers had been through a pretty rough time just before the shipment arrived. "Sometimes," he said, "I think America has forgotten we're in a war."

On November 11, as the nation pauses to honor the men and women who served in the U.S. military, we owe our newest veterans the respect and consideration of remembering their service and sacrifice.

For many of us, the line between those on active duty and those who are veterans is not distinct. That's a good thing, because every day in this country individuals join the ranks of those who served in the military since before the Revolution. It's not a rite of passage in this country. Rather, it's a continuing confirmation that service is required if we are to keep the republic strong and secure.

After all, November 11 is not a random date. It is the commemoration of the end of the first war America fought

in the 20th Century, and of those who served when called in 1917 and 1918.

Today's military is small, compared to that of the not too distant past. It's made up entirely of volunteers who continue to step up to defend all of us. They've served us faithfully, honorably and selflessly during more than a decade of war. We often hear that less than 1 percent of our population is defending the other 99 percent. That means that we're farther removed from the military than at any time in our history. One result of voluntary military service is that many Americans don't know someone who is serving in the armed forces, and I worry that the distance between the general population and those in the military has grown. That should be a concern for all of us.

Tomorrow, some new veteran will return to her hometown. There probably won't be a parade. Maybe she will go to college and move on to the rest of her life. The next day another veteran will come home. It happens every day that way, and all of us have a part to play in making the transition to civilian life as easy as it should be.

These veterans don't want much from us, but they deserve more than we might imagine. Veterans of earlier wars remember what it's like to return. Life in their hometown went on without them while they were away. Former schoolmates are almost finished with college and are starting careers and families.

We're truly blessed with this new generation of veterans. As with past generations, they bring home a wealth of knowledge, skills and experience, and each of us can lend a hand.

Help these returning veterans find a job and get settled. Make their kids feel at home in your local schools. Welcome them into your houses of worship. Given a chance, they'll make your towns stronger and better than ever. Just as those who returned from Europe and Asia, from Korea and Vietnam and from the deserts of Kuwait, these new veterans are poised to transform our neighborhoods and communities. Helping them is the right thing to do.

It's what the USO committed to do more than 70 years ago. The USO is there from the moment they enlist until

the moment they return - meeting the needs of troops and military families 30,000 times a day. We support and connect troops with their loved ones, bringing moments of joy through entertainment and bringing them comfort when the unthinkable happens.

Americans are generous people in good times and bad times. We understand the importance of service, and we should never forget to honor it. Let that soldier in Afghanistan know that we support him and everyone he serves with, and we'll all be here for them when they come home.

Sloan Gibson is the president and CEO of the United Service Organizations (USO), a private, not-for-profit organization with locations around the world.



John Forté, CTC Senior Mechanical Engineer and Captain, 420th Engineer Company, United States Army Reserve

A Salute to Veterans Honoring All Who Serve

Honoring every man and woman who has ever served in the United States Military.

We Salute You.

Concurrent Technologies Corporation (CTC) is a military-friendly organization. CTC was named one of the nation's top 5 Best for Vets Employers by Military Times EDGE Magazine and we earned the Extraordinary Employer Support Award from Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, which recognizes companies whose policies and practices go above and beyond in assisting and encouraging National Guard and Reserve service.



CTC is also a member of the 100,000 Jobs Mission, a coalition of companies committed to hiring at least 100,000 veterans by 2020. The coalition hired 92,869 veterans as of September 30, 2013.

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- A Member of the 100,000 Jobs Mission

Honoring Our Veterans By Keeping Our Promises



Senator Johnny Isakson (R-GA)

Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

We owe a great deal to the men and women who served in our armed forces. Our top priority on Veterans Day and every day should be to live up to the promises we have made to our servicemembers

who have shown such bravery in the face of tyranny around the world.

As a member of the Senate Veteran Affairs Committee, I frequently hear from Georgia veterans and across the country about the many challenges they face—from long waits for a VA disability claims decision to limited access to quality health care to difficulty finding civilian employment.

Far too often, our system is failing veterans. When we fail our veterans, we are also failing to honor their service and sacrifice.

By far, the most common issue I hear about from veterans is the outrageous wait times that they must endure in order to receive their hard earned benefits.

According to its own data, the VA set a goal to complete 1.27 million total claims by June 30 of this year, the end of the third quarter. Unfortunately, the VA fell short and completed only 1.17 million claims. Although the backlog remains unacceptably high, the VA is making progress and has imposed mandatory overtime to devote more hours to reducing the backlog in response to pressure from Congress, veterans organizations, and veterans.

I am committed to seeing that veterans don't have to face these incredibly long wait times to compensate them for their sacrifice, and I am working with

other members of Congress to conduct oversight to push the VA to eliminate the backlog. I am also committed to ensuring that the VA has the necessary resources to reach its goal of eliminating the backlog by 2015.

Another major area that must be improved is access to quality mental health care. According to a recent U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimate, 22 veterans commit suicide each day—that's about 8,000 each year. This extraordinarily alarming figure makes it quite obvious that mental health care must be a part of comprehensive approach to the care of our troops and veterans.

While I believe that the VA is committed to addressing this issue, it is critically important that we do better. In August of this year, I chaired a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee field hearing in Atlanta to examine the April 2013 reports from the Department of Veterans Affairs Inspector General detailing mismanagement of inpatient and contracted outpatient mental health programs at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. As a result of this hearing, I have asked the VA to take the necessary steps to maximize its resources to prevent these kinds of incidents both in Atlanta and throughout the country, and I will continue to work to see this process through.

As we have learned through the hearing and through examining this issue more closely, one important part of the solution is community-based partners. I encourage the VA to continue to collaborate with local mental health providers effectively to provide quality mental health care.

While the VA must make many improvements to ensure that veterans receive their benefits and are cared for, members of Congress can help provide resources and develop training programs to ensure that our veterans can find work when they return to civilian life.

The men and women who have served in uniform bring unique skills and training to the workforce, and our economy would gain from their leadership and work ethic. I'm a member of the Senate Veterans Jobs Caucus, which has launched an "I Hire Veterans" initiative to encourage all businesses to hire veterans, just as I have done in my own office.

I have worked together with my colleagues to pass the Post-9/11 G.I. legislation and the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, which aim to help veterans improve their educational and career opportunities for when they leave military service.

I am also working to help ease the problems some veterans have in obtaining licenses and credentials to practice

certain professions in civilian life. Oftentimes, they must take classes that are redundant of the training they received on active duty. For example, I am pushing for legislation requiring states to recognize military experience as a condition of receiving "Jobs for Veterans" state grants.

After more than a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, we expect to see more than 1 million servicemembers transition from active-duty to veteran status in the next few years. We must see to it that the Department of Veterans Affairs lives up to the promises we have made to our servicemembers and veterans.

As I spend this Veterans Day celebrating the service given by the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces, I am dedicated to supporting them once they return home from the battlefield.



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Profiles In Problem Solving: Obamacare vs. The Department Of Veterans Affairs



Representative Jeff Miller (R-FL)

Chairman, Veterans' Affairs Committee

Mere weeks after problems started surfacing with Healthcare.gov – the most visible public symbol of Obamacare – the Obama administration was clearly doing everything it could to fix the embattled website.

President Obama convened his top advisors for an Oval Office meeting to

chart the way forward and appointed entrepreneur and former budget official Jeffrey Zients, who the Washington Post described as "President Obama's weed-wacker," to lead the repair effort. Obama addressed the issue head on during an Oct. 21 press event, when he said people are "working overtime, 24/7" to fix the site and that, "we've had some of the best IT talent in the entire country join the team. And we're well into a 'tech surge' to fix the problem."

But the size, scope and urgency of the Obama administration's effort to right the course of Healthcare.gov stands in contrast to its hands-off approach to the string of problems at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

After decades of mismanagement, VA is struggling to deal with a host of serious issues that are negatively impacting veterans and dragging the department's reputation through the mud.

As of Nov. 2, the VA backlog – the number of VA disability compensation claims pending for more than 125 days – stood at more than 400,000. And while the department has made some progress chipping away at the problem over the last few months, VA still missed its fiscal year 2013 claims processing goal by nearly 100,000.

Meanwhile, claim appeals have risen by more than 15,000 since the backlog began to shrink in early April, raising

questions about whether the department is simply moving some backlogged cases from one queue to another.

But VA's problems go beyond the backlog. Americans have watched in disbelief as news reports of preventable veteran deaths at VA medical centers across the country have surfaced over the past year. At least 17 veterans are dead from lapses in care VA's own inspector general has attributed to mismanagement or negligence.

Through it all, a shocked public has learned that the VA executives who presided over exponential increases in the backlog and untimely veteran deaths are more likely to have received cash bonuses than any sort of punishment.

Though VA's problems had been festering for years under both Democrat and Republican administrations, many were hopeful when President Obama decided to discuss the challenges facing America's returning heroes at the 2013 Disabled American Veterans convention last August. I, for one, was disappointed with the president's speech.

To be clear, President Obama was right to speak directly to veterans. But his Aug. 10 address was notable for what he didn't say.

The president made no reference to the oft-cited 2015 goal VA has set for ending the backlog, even though he is the only person with the power to make sure

VA lives up to its word. He did not pledge to ensure VA and Department of Defense cooperation in developing a joint, integrated electronic health record, even though there is near universal agreement such a step would help shrink the backlog. And the president did not mention any actions he is taking to address VA's well-documented lack of accountability for failing executives – an issue contributing to many of the department's most serious challenges.

As commander-in-chief, President Obama is the only person in a position to hold VA leaders directly accountable, and his leadership and personal involvement is essential to solving these problems.

Obviously, the mounting complications with Obamacare, a law that will affect almost every American, deserve immediate attention. But shouldn't the administration treat the issues plaguing VA – an agency charged with delivering benefits and services to more than 20 million American veterans – with a similar sense of urgency?

Mr. President, we know your administration is committed to fixing Healthcare.gov by November 30. What about a personal commitment from you to end the backlog by 2015, just as VA leaders have promised?

Mr. President, now that you've instituted a "tech surge" to remedy the problems with Healthcare.gov, how

about a similar surge to ensure VA and DoD produce a joint electronic health record integrated across all VA and DoD components?

Mr. President, since you put a proven problem solver in charge to bring accountability to the Healthcare.gov repair effort, perhaps you could install someone with related skills at VA to put a stop to the pattern of preventable deaths at VA medical centers and ensure that department executives are held responsible – rather than rewarded – for their mistakes.

Is it too much to ask for the Obama administration to tackle the problems at VA with the same unrelenting determination it's directing toward Healthcare.gov?

I think not. The question is, does President Obama agree?



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Veterans Deserve More Than Budgeting By Crisis



Representative Mike Michaud (D-ME)

Ranking Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

Throughout our history, "to provide for the common defense" has meant living up to the promises we have made to the men and women who have provided for our national defense, and taking

care of the fiscal consequences of those promises. As our conflicts overseas draw to a close, it is time to reflect on and recommit to these promises, and to ensure that there is never any doubt that they will be kept, through good times and bad.

Recently, the government shutdown seemed to call into question this commitment to our veterans. As the days ticked by without a budget in place to fully fund the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), veterans began to fear that their benefit checks would not arrive in the mail, and the benefits and services promised to them would not be there when they needed them. Thankfully, cooler heads prevailed and November checks went out, and the VA is now fully open for business. But the funding fix was only temporary, so it's critical we diligently work to stop this from happening this year, as well as in years to come.

What we learned during the shutdown was the vital importance of an advance funding mechanism for the VA. Throughout the government shutdown, the doors of VA's health care facilities were open and fully staffed due to an important law Congress enacted in 2009 called the Veterans Health Care and Budget Reform and Transparency

Act. This law now ensures that a budget for VA's medical care accounts is in place before the start of the fiscal year. I was proud to have been an original cosponsor of that bill and to have fought for its passage. Because of that law, veterans were assured that the health care they earned would be there when they needed it.

Now is the time to extend this assurance to the remaining 14 percent of VA's discretionary budget. That's why I joined with Chairman Jeff Miller of Florida in introducing H.R. 813, the Putting Veterans Funding First Act of 2013, which would make sure all VA programs, not just health care, would receive advanced funding and not be in limbo due to the shameful political games we as a nation recently witnessed.

And while the bill provides critical advanced funding, it also would require needed reforms to VA's budget and planning process that will ensure its budgets are detailed and forward-looking. These reforms will help to better support advance appropriations and ensure veterans are provided adequate benefits and services over the long haul. I'm pleased that this important bipartisan provision was made part of H.R. 813 with the support of Chairman Miller.

In addition, as we painfully lurch

from budget crisis to budget crisis, I have looked for ways to ensure that veterans' programs are spared the effects of future across-the-board cuts. In 2010, Congress acted to protect programs administered by the VA from sequestration. I'm pleased that the administration has also taken this position. What remains uncertain, however, is the effect of any future sequestration orders on VA "administrative expenses." To address this uncertainty, I introduced H.R. 3181, the Defending Veterans from Sequestration Act of 2013. This bill will ensure that VA's administrative expenses, like its other expenses, are spared from the drastic impacts of sequestration going forward. VA must have the staff and support in place to continue to provide our veterans with the services and benefits they've earned.

Taken together, all of these measures will protect our veterans from the budgeting-by-crisis that has become the norm in Washington. These bills will ensure that VA is not included in any across-the-board cuts and that VA's discretionary budgets are fully in place at the start of the fiscal year. And they will reform the way VA plans and budgets in order to better provide the benefits and services we have promised to our veterans.

Looking forward, I believe that it's time that we start a national conversation regarding the importance of the service and sacrifice of our veterans, and our commitment to keep our word to these men and women in the years ahead. Far too many times in our history, after the wars are over and the confetti from the parades is swept from the street, our veterans are forgotten. This must never happen again. Our ability to keep our promises to our veterans has a direct effect on our ability to "provide for the common defense". This is not only true during our current budget crises, but is especially true as we face the rest of this decade and the decades to follow.





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Our Job Is Not Yet Done



Representative Gus M. Bilirakis (R-FL)
Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

Veterans Day provides us the opportunity to stop and take a moment to thank those who have served our nation as members of our Armed Services. These men and women, and their families, have made great sacrifices to defend the United States and deserve our utmost gratitude.

As Vice-Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I have made it a priority throughout my tenure in Congress to work with my colleagues to ensure the needs of our veterans are met. Earlier this year, legislation I sponsored was signed into law that directed the VA to obtain and distribute comprehensive information about institutions of higher learning, so our service members could make more informed decisions when they choose to use their Post-9/11 GI benefits. In addition, the House recently passed the Veterans Economic Opportunity Act to improve our service members' access to educational and medical benefits, as well as professional opportunities. Congress is also working with the VA to improve the processing of veterans' disability claims to reduce the

backlog and ensure claims are processed in a timely and accurate manner. However, there is more we can do to assist our service members, especially when it involves the invisible wounds of our recent wars.

Technological advances have made it possible for men and women to survive injuries on the battlefield that would have previously been fatal. As our nation's heroes reintegrate into society, they are faced with physical, mental and social challenges that have not been addressed in years past. Injuries, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury, are sometimes ignored or overlooked due to the stigmas associated with seeking treatment. There has also been a sharp rise in suicide rates among veterans as the war in Iraq has come to a close and the conflict in Afghanistan winds down. While the VA has committed to hiring more mental health professionals to meet the growing need, we as a country must also be there to support our veterans.

Free, confidential counseling with a trained VA staff member is only a phone call, text message or email away. One such

resource is the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255), which offers 24-hour support for all veterans and service members, including members of the National Guard and Reserve. It is important that we are not only aware of these resources, but also encourage our service members and veterans to utilize them, especially in times of need.

We must also remain committed to ensuring veterans receive appropriate treatment for their service-connected injuries. At a recent Congressional hearing, my colleagues and I learned that the VA's use of prescription opiates to treat pain has tripled since September 11, 2001. We received testimony from veterans who described their frustrations and difficulties navigating the VA health system in efforts to find relief from their pain. We also heard from widows of veterans who had died due to overdoses as a result of the number of different prescriptions they had received. Dr. Robert Jesse, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health at the Veterans Health Administration, promised the VA was committed to righting their practices, so others would not

find themselves in similar situations. I echo this promise and will continue to work to ensure our veterans receive the appropriate care and treatment they deserve.

Let us always remember the importance of remaining vigilant and supporting our heroes upon their return home. Today and every day forward, take a moment to thank those who have answered the call of duty and offer your support in their times of need. It is up to all of us, as well as our future generations, to honor their sacrifices, as well as the principles and freedoms they have protected.



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Serving Those Who Have Served This Veterans Day



Representative Phil Roe, M.D. (R-TN)
Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

Today, November 11, our nation observes Veterans Day. This solemn occasion offers an opportunity to honor America's veterans—and their families—for their patriotism, love of country, and willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.

It is my privilege to ensure the veterans receive the care and benefits they earned and deserve. As a veteran of the U.S. Army Medical Corps, I salute the devotion, service and legacy our veterans have instilled on our culture, even as many veterans regard their own military service with modesty and humility.

Veterans Day serves as a powerful reminder of how our nation's liberty and justice has been preserved by the dedication of our armed forces. But this special day also underscores our need to recommit to America's veterans and their families.

As a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am committed to the well being of our nation's heroes. That is why we must work to resolve the claims backlog at the Department of Veterans

Affairs as soon as possible. I was proud to support H.R. 2189, which would establish a commission to evaluate the disability claims backlog, when it passed the House on October 28. As of October 21, the VA's backlog of claims that are 125 days old or older was down to 411,704, but we can do better and we must take steps to ensure this kind of backlog never happens again.

It is critically important that Congress put partisanship aside to ensure our veterans have the resources they need. That is why I supported the bipartisan Putting Veterans Funding First Act that was brought before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. This bill would require Congress to fully fund the Department of Veterans Affairs' discretionary budget a year ahead of schedule, ensuring that all VA services have timely, predictable funding, despite any gridlock in Washington. This bill awaits full consideration by the House. The men and women who serve our nation deserve the best care, equipment, training and support we can give them and this bill is a step in the right direction to

ensure they receive those resources.

The Putting Veterans Funding First Act is one just example of the Veterans' Affairs Committee stepping up to meet our promises to veterans and to provide for our men and women in uniform. I count it as one of my chief duties in Congress to ensure that our armed forces are fully supplied with the equipment, technology, and support necessary to successfully accomplish their mission of defending and protecting the United States. Both of these bills await action.

As President John Adams said, "Our liberty must be preserved regardless of the cost." On this Veterans Day, I hope you'll join me in expressing our deepest gratitude to the men and women who have paid that cost in a very personal way, as well as to those who continue to pay it today. As Adams went on to say, our liberty has been "earned and bought... at the expense of their ease, their estates... and their blood."

We should be proud of our brave servicemembers who are sacrificing daily to

stop our enemies in their tracks. It is essential that we support the strategies and policies put forth by our own commanders on the ground.

This Veterans Day, let us remember that we must honor and care for those who so bravely fought for our freedom. Let us honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. Let us also remember all of the men and women who are currently deployed and who are in harm's way. They are constantly in my thoughts and prayers.



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Thanking All Who Served On Veterans Day



Representative Mike Coffman (R-CO)
Member of Armed Services, Small Business & Veterans Affairs

I did not serve in Vietnam. The soldiers with whom I completed Basic Combat Training and Advanced Individual Training, in the fall of 1972, were assigned either to Germany or South Korea. None of us had orders for South Vietnam. The last U.S. ground troops had departed from South Vietnam on August 23, 1972. I finished my two-year Army enlistment in the summer of 1974 and came back home to Colorado where I took advantage of the G.I. Bill and enrolled as a student at the University of Colorado.

That fall, I remember sitting in a class at the university when the subject of America's involvement in the war in Vietnam came up. The professor turned to the class for comments. One student confidently opined that the only ones who allowed themselves to be drafted into the Army and sent to Vietnam were simply too dumb to know how to avoid military service.

I was surprised, but not shocked, by his comment because he was part of a cultural narrative that had evolved around a conflict and developed into an antiwar movement. Many of those who avoided

being drafted into military service during Vietnam looked down on those who were willing to go as participants in an unjust war.

In 1969, when I was just 14 years old, I volunteered with the Junior Red Cross to help comfort wounded soldiers at the Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center in Aurora, Colorado. Almost all of the soldiers were amputees who became casualties from mines and booby traps while fighting in the jungles of South Vietnam. The morale of the wounded was very low. They felt abandoned by both the U.S. Army and by the American people. The state-of-the-art prosthetics that today's wounded have did not exist then so there was little thought of rehabilitation or reintegration back into the Army. Once their physical conditions stabilized, these wounded would be transferred to hospitals run by the Veterans Administration that were often substandard in terms of quality of care.

As the American people became increasingly divided about their support for the Vietnam War they also became increasingly divided in their support for those who

fought in that war. Many of these wounded soldiers were never welcomed home and thanked for their sacrifices. They were also isolated from the civilian community around the Army hospitals; they wanted simply to forget about the war and go on with their lives. No one ever stopped by to thank them for their service. Their only visitors were family members who would stay in the hotels just across the street from the front gate.

While at the University of Colorado I continued serving in the military through the U.S. Army Reserve and upon graduation transferred to the Marine Corps where I became an infantry officer. I would later serve in the first Gulf War and the Iraq War; my experiences after returning home were completely different from those who had served in Vietnam decades earlier. Unlike those returning from the war in Vietnam, I was truly welcomed home.

Today, the deep level of respect the American people have for those serving and those who have served our country in the military that has not been felt since WWII. Even during the height of the

politically divisive Iraq War, the American people were united, not only in their respect for those who served in the war but in feeling a profound sense of responsibility to take care of our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families after they came home.

We must never again forget to appreciate the sacrifices of all who have served our nation in uniform. Veterans Day is a great day to thank those veterans who, like our Vietnam vets, never received a proper "welcome home."



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Let's Honor Our Veterans By Working Together, Solving Problems



Representative Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ)
Arizona Congressional District One

The 24/7 news cycle is filled with noisy partisan battles, but we can't let that drown out the urgent need to work together and solve problems.

Especially when it comes to our veterans.

The VA claims backlog is one of those problems. Despite some progress this year, too many of our veterans remain stuck in this backlog – and they deserve better. Delayed care is denied care.

That's why earlier this year I introduced the VA Claims, Operations and Records Efficiency Act, or VA CORE, which will help tackle the backlog. It passed the House with bipartisan support as an amendment to the Defense reauthorization bill.

VA CORE directs the Defense Department to enact an efficient, electronic transfer of veterans' records – instead of the outdated paperwork process that is currently used. Federal agencies need to leave paperwork in the past and adopt an efficient, electronic approach.

As Arizona's only member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am working every day to solve problems like these on

behalf of my state's more than half-million veterans. And my congressional district – diverse, sprawling and mostly rural – holds its own unique challenges for our veterans.

Arizona's District One has 12 Native American tribes – about 23 percent of the district's population. Among those tribes is the Navajo Nation, the largest land-based tribe in the United States.

The Navajo Nation recently lowered its flags to half-staff to mourn the passing of a hero – Navajo Code Talker Nelson Draper Sr., who died at 96.

When World War II started, Nelson was a young man living in Chinle on the Navajo Nation. He joined the Marines to train as a Code Talker and participated in many battles on the Pacific. After the war, he stayed with the Marine Corps and offered a lifetime of service to our country.

Many of us are familiar with the noble legacy of Code Talkers like Nelson Draper Sr. – heroes whose unbreakable code saved countless lives in World War II. But fewer people are aware that Native Americans in general have a greater proportion of veterans

than the rest of the U.S. population.

Yet when these veterans return home to their tribal communities, they may lack access to the facilities and care they need. Arizona, for example, has more than 10,000 Native American veterans – but not a single veteran nursing home on tribal land.

A recent effort to build a veteran nursing home on the Navajo Nation failed because of a simple oversight in federal law: Construction on tribal land is ineligible for the 65 percent VA construction reimbursement and per diem grants that support such projects on land owned by states, territories or the federal government.

Tribal communities are often in remote areas and provide a unique cultural support system, so it's important to keep these veterans near their families while in nursing care. That's why I recently introduced a bipartisan bill to boost tribal construction of veteran nursing care homes.

My bill would designate that veteran nursing care homes built on tribal land qualify for those VA construction funds and per diem grants. It's a simple fix, and

it's the right thing to do – and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle agree. I am also proud and grateful that the Navajo Nation and Inter Tribal Council of Arizona have passed resolutions of support for my bill.

We have a duty to solve these problems and keep the promises we've made to those who have served and sacrificed for us all. Helping our veterans isn't a partisan issue – it's a national responsibility.

U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., serves on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and is Ranking Member of its Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.



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- ★ PUBLIC EDUCATION
- ★ RECREATION AND MOTIVATION
- ★ PROGRAM GRANTS

"THEY DESERVE MORE THAN OUR GRATITUDE"

(See Coalition Op-ed This Insert)



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Keeping Our Promises To Our Veterans



Representative Bill Flores (R-TX)

Member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee

Every day, our nation's service members continue to do whatever their country asks of them, enduring hardships that few of us could fathom. On Veterans Day, Americans pause to honor those brave men and women who have risked their lives in service to our nation and pay

tribute to their dedication to America.

There is perhaps no greater sacrifice that an American can make than serving our country during a time of war. We are eternally indebted to all of the men and women across the world who have served or who are currently serving to ensure our generation preserves liberty and freedom to pass on to our children and grandchildren.

The demands placed on those serving in our Armed Forces – multiple deployments, the stress of extended separation from loved ones, the physical and psychological wounds of war and the sometimes difficult transition back to civilian life due to our current economic uncertainty – have never been greater.

As a Representative in Congress, I am always mindful of our obligations to our military men and women who defend America against her enemies today and to our veterans who defended us in the past.

As a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee and as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, I am working to ensure our veterans receive the best health care possible, have the ability to obtain the benefits that they have earned, have a successful transition from military to civilian life and enjoy the career opportunities that come from a healthy

American economy.

In Congress, there is a lot of partisan politics, but when it comes to our veterans, Congress usually works together in a bi-partisan matter to help our nation fulfill its promises for their service.

The House Veterans' Affairs Committee is working hard on proposed legislation to help assist our veterans and providing much needed oversight of the Veterans Administration.

Just two weeks ago, the House passed the Veterans Economic Opportunity Act, which I introduced. This legislation helps reform, simplify and enhance important VA programs that provide the tools to help veterans reach economic success.

In September, Congress passed, and the president signed into law, the Improving Job Opportunities for Veterans Act. This law extended several economic opportunities initiatives that include homeless veterans programs, grant extensions to assist disabled veterans with home modifications and the adaptive athletic program for disabled veterans.

To address the growing concern with the nationwide VA disability claims backlog, the Veterans' Affairs Committee passed legislation, which would establish a commission to investigate the backlog. The commission

will provide recommendations for improving VA's claims processing and will continue to advise until the backlog is eliminated.

Earlier this year, the House passed the Ruth Moore Act, which reforms the standards of evidence for survivors of military sexual trauma who file claims for mental health conditions. This legislation would make it easier for veteran sexual-assault victims to receive service-connected benefits and treatment for mental-health conditions linked to military sexual trauma.

Even though federal government faces acute fiscal challenges, these difficulties should not cause us to avoid fulfilling our commitments to our military and to our veterans. I firmly believe that Washington should never think about playing political games on the backs of our veterans and military.

One of the most important things that Washington can do for our military and veterans is to adopt policies to facilitate private sector job creation and economic growth. Fiscal responsibility and national security are directly proportional. In order to keep a strong military and maintain our national security, we must first have a strong and growing economy. This can be accomplished through tax reform, regulatory reforms, deficit reduction and

American energy security initiatives.

I remain committed to standing up for our veterans and their benefits which they earned through service and sacrifice. We must continue our work to keep our promises to these brave men and women.

It is imperative that we give our military men and women the proper care and tools to be successful when they return home. Our military and our veterans "have our back" and Congress should always "have their back."

On Veterans Day, we pay tribute to Americans from every generation who has served for our freedom. Because of their sacrifice, millions here and around the world enjoy the blessings of liberty. May God bless our veterans, our troops and the United States of America.



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Tearing Down The Wall: Better Serving Our Veterans In The Digital Age



Representative Brad Wenstrup (R-OH)

Member, Veterans' Affairs Committee

Nearly 24 years ago, American leadership helped bring down the Berlin Wall without firing a shot. Now, our service members and veterans are up against a new wall, a wall of bureaucracy. This wall complicates nearly every facet of life as they transition

from active duty service to veteran status.

This Veterans Day, we must renew our commitment to those who have served us. Our task begins by ensuring that their medical records, which document years or decades of service, seamlessly follow them from uniformed to veteran status. This year, the House of Representatives is taking action to push both the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to realize this goal.

Our troops face numerous challenges after they serve: transitioning to civilian life, finding a career, or continuing their education, to name just a few. Our veterans should not have to serve as couriers between the DoD and VA too. It's an additional and unnecessary burden. We are all one nation and our agencies should operate like it. Unfortunately, in typical government fashion, our two biggest departments are still not fully capable of digitally communicating in the 21st century.

Early in his Presidency, President Obama charged these two departments to "build a seamless system of integration with a single goal: when a member of the Armed Forces separates from the military, he or she will no longer have to walk paperwork from a DoD duty station to a local VA health center;

their electronic records will transition along with them and remain with them forever."

Unfortunately, this original vision of one shared system for all our past and present service members has devolved into a series of missed milestones, shifting priorities, and ballooning budgets. The House Veterans' Affairs Committee learned earlier this year that these failures have led President Obama and both departments to abandon the original goal of one system, and instead plan continued reliance on separate systems integrated together to connect electronic health records.

I served as an Army combat surgeon in Iraq and I still serve as a Reservist. I know that my fellow military members, when they retire, should not have to continue to wage war at home against bureaucracies and paperwork. And yet, a doctor treating veterans cannot seamlessly access the medical history of their patient because that history is housed in a separate Defense Department system. VA doctors report that initial steps are improving this digital sharing, while still on separate systems. We can and must do better for our veterans.

As a physician of 26 years, I have firsthand experience with electronic health record systems – my practice undertook the transition in 2012. I know

that every doctor wants to spend their time caring for patients, not navigating complex computer systems trying to hunt down vital medical history.

These frustrations won't disappear until the federal government achieves its stated goal of building an integrated system.

This year, the House of Representatives is actively working to tackle these issues through the bipartisan H.R. 1960, which I was proud to help pass the House this summer. Important sections call for basic interoperability capabilities within a year, meaning that doctors on both sides will be able to readily view medical history files.

By 2016, we are demanding full system integration between the two departments. These are essential steps towards realizing a system that seamlessly communicates medical history files between the departments, without forcing the burden on to the shoulders of our transitioning veterans. Ultimately, I believe one system will best serve our troops and veterans as they seek care, and full integration is steering the departments in the right direction.

Fully integrating these electric health records isn't just about helping transitioning veterans, it's also essential to reducing our veterans' disability backlog. We know that fully

developed disability claims, those with complete medical history files, take half the amount of time to complete compared to claims filed with incomplete or missing data.

It's discouraging for our troops, our veterans, and our doctors to face a wall of bureaucracy that hinders care. They deserve a lasting solution that honors their legacy and service, and I will continue pushing both federal agencies towards an integrated, and ultimately shared, system for our service members, past and present.

Brad Wenstrup represents Ohio's 2nd Congressional District and serves on both the House Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs Committees. He is currently a LTC in the Army Reserve.



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A Reminder Of The Strength Of Our Nation



COL Miguel Howe, USA, Ret.
Director, Military Service Initiative, George W. Bush Institute

For more than twelve years of war, the indomitable strength of character, mind, body and spirit of the men and women of our Armed Forces has embodied the strength of our Nation. As our military servicemen and women come home, the strength of our Nation will also reside in the character of the citizens and communities that effectively honor support and empower this

generation of veterans and their families to continue to serve as national assets in new and meaningful ways.

The strength of our nation was evident during the 3rd Annual Bush Center Warrior Open, a golf tournament for members of the U.S. military who were severely wounded in the global war on terror. For three days this highly competitive and inspiring event honored our warriors and their families, but also served to unite the non-profits, businesses and communities who support them. Fourteen PGA Tour Professionals, from the legendary Lee Trevino, to champions like Justin Leonard and David Graham, honored our Warriors and their families by playing in the Pro-Am practice round. The Pros, like the rest of the gallery were moved by the physical, mental and emotional strength of these 24 Warriors who, despite severe injury, trauma and loss competed on the golf course as elite athletes. President Bush described the event as "a celebration of patriotism, courage, and sacrifice," and noted that the participants "serve as a testimony to all people who have been dealt a tough hand...but have the resolve and the desire to live life to the fullest."

These Warriors have lived the Warrior Ethos - "I will always place the mission first, I will never accept defeat, I will never quit, I will never leave a fallen comrade." They lived it on the

battlefield, and in recovery, and did so again on the golf course. Staff Sergeant Bobby Dove did not quit, gutting out ten holes of golf on a broken prosthetic leg held together by the spare prosthetic arm parts and electrical tape of his competitor and fellow Warrior who would not leave him behind, Major Ken Dwyer. Sergeant Tim Lang did not leave a fallen comrade, staying late with Lieutenant Brian Donarski on the practice green after a tough first day, coaching him to an overall third place finish. When someone asked Lang, why would you help someone you are competing with, not only for the overall win, but an automatic re-qualifying berth? Tim was perplexed, "Why wouldn't I help him? He is my brother and fellow warrior."

Those in attendance witnessed fierce competition, and the camaraderie, respect, friendship and common bond that comes with a shared mission, sacrifice and loss. Sergeant Saul Martinez said, "Being around my wounded brothers has been huge." First Sergeant Jason Stamer and Staff Sergeant Andrew Montgomery were paired together on the final day of the tournament just two years after they fought together in the same company in Afghanistan and were seriously wounded only 30 days apart.

These warriors, who embody the strength of the Nation, stand ready to continue to serve in a new way, and

with a renewed purpose. Those who have borne the sacrifice and loss that comes with ensuring our freedom and security are further strengthened by the support of their families and communities. "We are in awe of what the communities and the organizations do to support us," said Master Sergeant Sean Bennett. Those communities and organizations include non-profits, businesses, corporations, foundations, and individuals who play a prominent role in empowering all of our post-9/11 veterans and military families. This year's Warrior Open recognized eight great Military Service Organizations that have been particularly effective in facilitating service members in the areas of jobs, wellness, education, family and housing so that they can continue to serve in a meaningful way.

The Warrior Open drew tremendous community support for the participant not only through this tournament, but beyond the golf course. I saw a senior business leader offer a job to one of the Warriors. A non-profit offered a mortgage-free home to another. The work of the Bush Center extends beyond the Warrior Open in that regard – to bring communities, non-profits, businesses and individual citizens together to effectively support our veterans and military families.

Sergeant Tim Lang said, "That is what the President has done with the

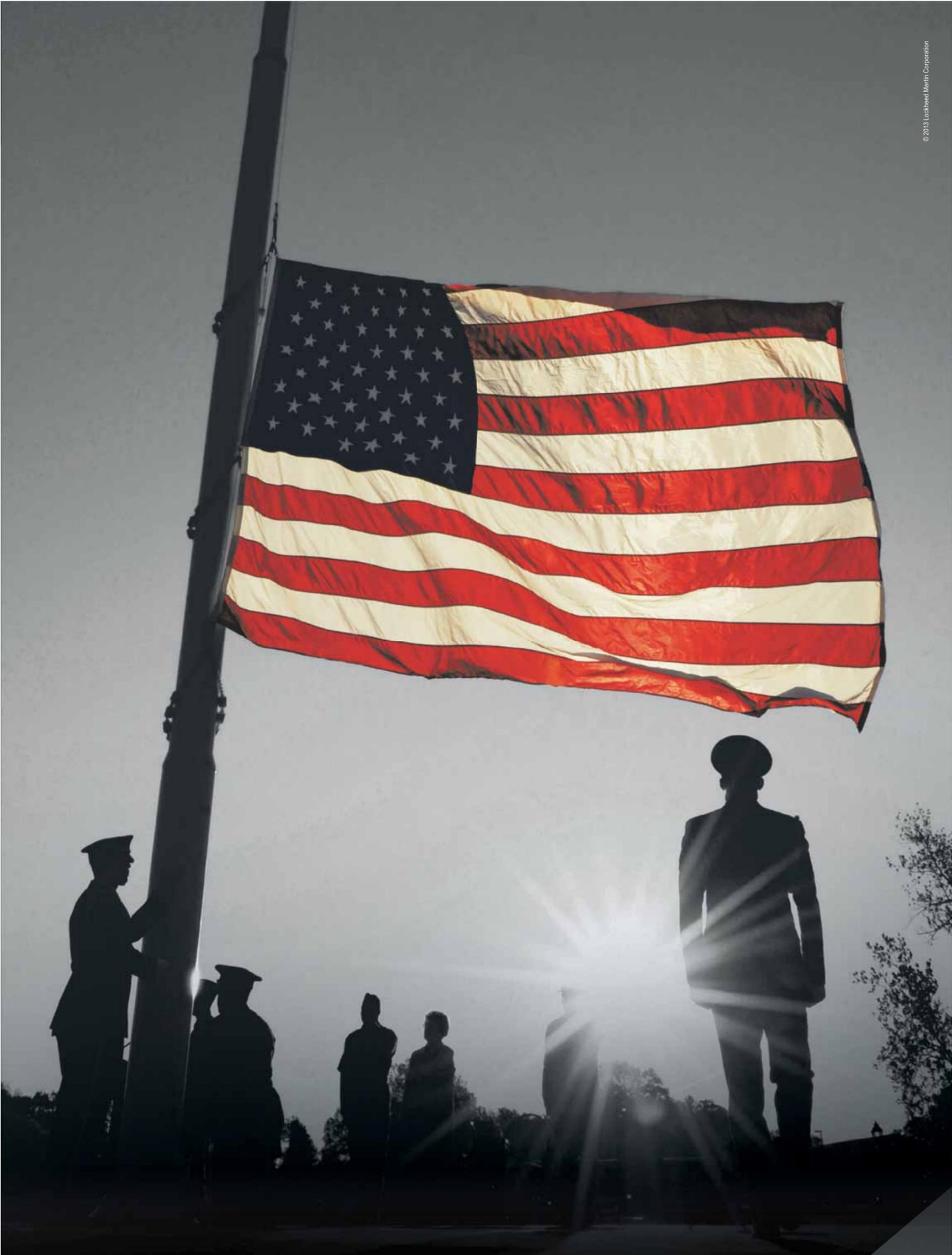
Bush Center and the Warrior Open... to bring the community on board, to bring the veterans from a low point, back to the top of the mountain." But it's Lang who reminds us all that our support for America's brave warriors is ultimately what defines our Nation's strength.

Colonel Miguel Howe, USA, Ret. is the director of the Military Service Initiative at the George W. Bush Institute in Dallas, TX. The Military Service Initiative works to unite and empower the work of non-profits, businesses, universities, individual citizens and communities to effectively support all post-9/11 veterans in the areas of jobs, wellness, education, housing, family and women's veteran issues, so that they can continue to serve as national assets after they leave military service.



GEORGE W. BUSH
INSTITUTE
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Ninety-five years ago — at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month — the guns fell silent, and the veterans of that conflict came marching home. Today, we honor them, and every veteran. And we thank them for their service and sacrifices.



They Deserve More Than Our Gratitude



David W. Walker
President & CEO

Coalition to Salute America's Heroes

The drawdown of America's military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan is welcome news to the millions of weary men and women who have been deployed, often multiple times, to those hostile and unforgiving places. But for far too many returning veterans, the harsh reality of war has been replaced by the cruel indifference of a nation that professes its gratitude yet stubbornly refuses to meet its solemn

obligations to them.

The numbers are sobering. More than 50,000 U.S. troops have been physically wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. Many who otherwise would have been killed were saved by modern medical and battlefield technology. Thousands have sacrificed limbs and as many as 300,000 suffer from the debilitating effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

On an average day, one active duty soldier commits suicide. Among veterans, the rate soars to nearly one every hour.

Unemployment, divorce and homelessness among wounded veterans are much higher than the national average, and female veterans are four times as likely to be homeless as their male counterparts.

Without question, the need is great. Yet these true American heroes often receive little or no support from the nation for which they sacrificed so much. Because of a shortage of funding and an interminable bureaucratic backlog at the Veterans Administration, they wait for roughly a year, on average, to receive disability pay and benefits. If there is an issue in dispute, the wait can take years. Many need basic assistance, such as help in setting up and furnishing an apartment and finding employment. Thousands don't get the therapy they need for PTSD because it simply is misunderstood. The suicide rate among these patriotic young

people is truly heartbreaking.

Let's be honest: If the Obama Administration and Congress focused their energies as much on fixing the system as they have on partisan one-upsmanship, the backlog would have been erased long ago. It's simply a matter of priority, and our elected officials have made it clear, year after year, that returning veterans can wait at the back of the line.

Organizations like the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes are filling the void as best we can with voluntary donations from concerned citizens committed to helping veterans in critical need. I'm proud of the work we do in providing a lifeline to thousands of combat-wounded veterans of the War on Terror. Our Emergency Financial Aid program has stopped foreclosure proceedings on veterans' homes and kept their vehicles from being repossessed. We regularly provide gift checks to cover meals, medical and utility bills, clothing, car repairs and even baby diapers.

But isn't there something inherently wrong about the wealthiest nation in human history sending its sons and daughters off to war, then telling them to rely on the kindness of strangers to avert a homecoming scarred by unemployment, poverty and homelessness? Wouldn't it be better if organizations like ours became obsolete?

The veterans we pause to salute today deserve better. In fact, they

deserve our best. But instead, they face a creeping indifference that comes not from a lack of caring but from a lack of connection to two wars that have required virtually zero sacrifice from the vast majority of us over the last 12 years.

For too long our leaders have been giving veterans' issues lip service, then expending the least possible political capital on finding a solution. It's time we hold them to account.

On behalf of the nation's combat-wounded veterans, I challenge the Obama Administration and Congress to put this national disgrace behind us, with a fixed deadline of Veterans Day 2014.

We know what needs to be done. It's simply a matter of making it a priority.

Fix the broken VA disability claims processing system and eliminate the backlog. Streamline the appeals process for veterans whose claims are initially denied. Work with the private sector to provide job training that will ease the transition for veterans moving from active duty and Reserves to civilian life.

These are not insurmountable problems. If we commit the right resources, sharpen our focus and work with a sense of urgency (a trait unfamiliar to the VA), the backlog can be eliminated.

I urge you to join me today in a patriotic crusade to ensure that no soldier is left behind by our nation for another Veterans Day. Fly your flag, cheer at

your local parade and offer your heartfelt thanks to the men and women that defend our freedoms. Then, instead of going back to your everyday routine, pick up the phone or write a letter and tell those you've elected that they must address the disgraceful backlog at the VA. Immediately.

I'm asking you because the proud men and women I meet every day won't. It's time we go to battle for them.

David Walker was appointed President & CEO of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes in July 2012. Based in Leesburg, VA, the 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan organization has provided an invaluable lifeline to thousands of America's wounded veterans since its establishment in 2004. The Coalition is distinguished from other veteran-focused organizations by its direct financial assistance to America's wounded heroes. For more information, visit them online at www.saluteheroes.org.




NEED A COFFEE BREAK?

OUR TROOPS DO, TOO.

Every day, the USO welcomes nearly 30,000 troops and their families at our locations around the world, to help them relax and feel at home.

EVERY MOMENT COUNTS

Take a moment to thank our troops and their families at USOmoments.org.



About This Supplement

This supplement was produced by the Advocacy Department of The Washington Times and did not involve the Editorial Staff of The Washington Times. The viewpoints expressed by the participants are published as a public service.

For more information about this supplement or to learn more about placing your advertisement, please contact Peter Vandevanter at 202-636-3027.



Honor. Courage.
Commitment.
Integrity.

One million veterans are expected to transition to civilian careers over the next four years. Approximately 82% of U.S. manufacturers report they cannot find the skilled workforce to fill their open advanced manufacturing jobs. Led by GE and the Manufacturing Institute, a group of manufacturers, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations, including the Gary Sinise Foundation, formed the Get Skills to Work coalition to train veterans and fill advanced manufacturing jobs.

The Get Skills to Work coalition works with employers, colleges and communities to give veterans the necessary skills and certifications to meet the needs of the available jobs in their areas. Dedication to the local workforce, community programs and job creation will continue to drive manufacturing growth.

GetSkillsToWork.org

Every branch.
Every war.
Every story.
Today, we honor those who served
and those who serve.
For all they have given to the country,
we can never thank them enough.

