

Honoring our Veterans

Since our nation's founding, the U.S. military has been dispatched to all parts of the world to defend our freedom and that of our allies. In battles big and small, the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces have distinguished themselves through their strength, loyalty and valor. Their service, however, has not come without great sacrifice. Hundreds of thousands of Americans have died and millions more injured defending this country.

Budget for Veterans Programs

Each year, Congress honors America's veterans through resolutions and floor statements. I wholeheartedly support these ceremonial acts, but they are no substitute for providing appropriate benefits and quality health care to our nation's veterans.

This year, President Obama submitted a [Fiscal Year 2010 budget request](#) to Congress that will increase funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) by 15% this year and by \$25 billion over the next five years. This funding will provide increased services for homeless veterans, mental health care and traumatic brain injuries, and the timely implementation of the Post-9/11 G.I. bill to expand educational entitlements.

The cost of providing health care to our nation's veterans has increased by 10 percent in recent years. While in office, President Bush and the Republican Congress consistently cut funding for veterans' programs, while increasing the health care costs to veterans. I am so pleased that the Democratic majority, for the past 2 fiscal years, has provided historic funding increases to the VA, and that President Obama, for the first time in years, provided a budget request that will actually make a difference in our veterans' lives.

I am hopeful that the President's budget request will adequately care for the nearly 50,000 veterans living in California's 15th District, and those troops returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan who have served our nation honorably. I look forward to working with VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and my colleagues on the House Appropriations Committee to make sure our veterans are treated honorably.

Our nation must not, and cannot, shortchange the brave men and women who have served in our armed forces, and their families. The Democratic majority is committed to working in a

bipartisan way to ensure that the budget honors the service of our veterans, and builds a future worthy of their sacrifice.

Post 9/11 GI Bill

Since World War II, providing educational benefits to returning service members has served an invaluable role in stimulating recruitment and retention for our Armed Services. In assisting veterans readjusting to civilian life, these educational benefits have also enhanced our nation's competitiveness through the development of a more highly educated and productive workforce. However, when the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) was signed into law in 1984, members of the Selected Reserve were seldom mobilized. Consequently, standard MGIB benefits reflected that reality. The situation has changed today. More than 500,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve have been called to duty since the events of September 11, 2001, and more than 70,000 have been deployed for two or more tours of duty.

On June 30 th, 2008, a new the Post 9/11 GI Bill was signed into public law. This new GI bill restores full, four-year college scholarships to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to help make them part of an economic recovery like the veterans of World War II. I was extremely proud to support this measure, both as a cosponsor of the legislation and on the House floor. This will give veterans in our district an opportunity to pursue their educational dreams.

If you are a veteran who has served at least 90 aggregate days on active duty after September 11, 2001, [click here](#) to learn more about this exciting new educational benefit.

Veterans Emergency Medical Care

Imagine an uninsured veteran who has a medical emergency and is rushed to a nearby hospital that happens to be a non-VA hospital. The veteran receives care until he or she is in stable condition, at which point the hospital attempts to transfer the veteran to a VA-hospital. If the VA hospital has available beds, care will resume at the VA facility and the VA will reimburse the non-VA hospital for the emergency treatment. If, however, there are no beds available at the VA hospital, the veteran must be returned to the non-VA facility and would be required to cover the costs for all care thereafter.

One of my constituents told me about how this happened to him. For uninsured veterans who find themselves in this situation, their medical emergency can turn into a financial disaster. This scenario is increasingly likely as more troops return home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the 109th and 110th Congresses, I introduced legislation to fix this injustice, H.R. 4146 in the 110 th Congress. My bill clarified the language in the current law so that the nightmare scenario above would never again become reality for any of our veterans. It clearly stated that the VA must cover an uninsured veteran's emergency health care costs – before and after stabilization – if no VA hospital bed is available at a geographically accessible VA facility. This important clarification will save many veterans a great deal of grief, and was endorsed by AMVETS and the American Legion. On January 17, 2008, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Subcommittee on Health, held a hearing on H.R. 4146.

While H.R. 4146 did not progress in the House as a stand alone bill in the 110 th Congress, legislation which achieves the same result as H.R. 4146, introduced by Rep. Zack Space, was ultimately included into a larger measure in the Senate, and signed into public law in December 2008. I am pleased that this nightmare scenario which cost my constituent an enormous sum of money, will no longer affect other veterans.

Equity for Filipino Veterans

In 1946, Congress rescinded a promise to provide veterans benefits to Filipino soldiers, turning its backs on the brave Filipino veterans who fought with the United States to rid the world of tyranny and fascism during WWII. While some Filipino veterans now receive full veterans' benefits, many others waited for nearly six decades for Congress to do the right thing and restore the benefits that were promised to them.

Throughout my career in Congress, I strongly supported several pieces of legislation aimed at providing full benefits to Filipino Veterans of the Commonwealth Army who valiantly fought under our flag in WWII. Restoring these benefits to the Filipino Veterans has been one of my highest priorities in Congress.

On February 15, 2007, Chairman Bob Filner of the [House Committee on Veterans Affairs](#) held a hearing on

[Equity for Filipino Veterans](#)

, during which I was invited to present testimony. I was honored to have had the opportunity to share my thoughts with the Committee in honor of these veterans. I strongly believe that a promise made should be a promise kept, especially when it comes to veterans, and it is imperative we honor the promise made to our Filipino veterans by restoring their benefits.

After a decades-long struggle, Filipino World War II veterans have [finally](#) received the recognition and compensation they deserve for their brave service to the U.S. during World War II. This recognition and compensation, coming in the form of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signed by President Obama on February 18, 2009, represents the culmination of an advocacy effort led by the veterans themselves with the support of Filipino community organizations, and congressional leaders such as Rep. Xavier Becerra, Rep. Bob Filner, Senator Daniel Inouye, Senator Daniel Akaka and other members of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC).

While they had to wait for wait more than six decades, Filipino veterans now have received the recognition and some of the compensation they so greatly deserve. Signed two days after the 63rd anniversary of the 1946 Rescission Act that deprived the veterans of their rightful benefits, the stimulus bill offered a one-time payment of \$15,000 for [Filipino veterans in the U.S.](#) and \$9,000 for those in the Philippines.

For the veterans, this victory came none too soon. Today, out of the quarter of a million Filipino soldiers who fought for the U.S., fewer than 18,000 are still alive.

We must learn from this decades-long struggle for justice. Let us look ahead and keep our word to never again treat our veterans this way. All our veterans deserve the best treatment, whether they fought in Iraq, Afghanistan or Corregidor. Since our nation's founding, the U.S. military has been dispatched to all parts of the world to defend our freedom and that of our allies. In battles big and small, the men and women fighting on our behalf have distinguished themselves through their strength, loyalty and valor. Let us treat them with the same dignity with which they made their sacrifices, and take care of all our veterans when they return home.

Justice for U.S. POWs

I have also sought justice for tens of thousands of American World War II soldiers who were held as prisoners of war by Japan. Many of these soldiers were part of the [Bataan Death March](#), during

which they were forced to march over 60 miles with little food or water. Those who survived this march were turned over to private Japanese companies, such as Mitsubishi, Mitsui and Nippon Steel, to serve as slave laborers. During this period of enslavement, thousands of Americans perished working for the economic benefit of Japanese companies—many of which still operate today.

Last year, Japan's Ambassador to the United States, Ichiro Fujisaki [issued an apology](#) on behalf of the government of Japan, to the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor. I commend Ambassador Fujisaki for his recognition and sincere apology for his nation's brutal treatment of US POWs during World War II, and I am hopeful that his apology will help move forward full justice for these brave men.

The U.S. government has historically blocked efforts by these POWs to sue these Japanese corporations for compensation. I introduced legislation in the 107th and 108th Congresses to guarantee these POWs their day in court, and was a cosponsor of Rep. Duncan Hunter's [H.R. 5972](#) in the 109th Congress. Unfortunately, legislation to bring justice or compensation to these slave laborers has not been passed to date, but I will continue to advocate for their cause in the 111th Congress.