

News from Representative Adam Smith

REPRESENTATIVE
ADAM SMITH
 WASHINGTON'S NINTH DISTRICT



Happy Veterans Day! As we honor the brave service of all of our veterans, I want to give you an update on my efforts in Congress to support veterans and their families.

The men and women of our Armed Services risk their lives around the world every day to protect our values and freedoms. In return, we must ensure that they and their families are taken care of when they return home. I am honored to represent thousands of veterans who have chosen to make their home in the Puget Sound region.

As the Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), I recognize the need to do everything we can to guarantee they receive the benefits that they deserve.

Even during these tough economic times—with sequestration and budget cuts—we cannot fall short on our commitment to care for those who have selflessly served our nation. Congress must continue to adequately provide veterans with access to high quality health care, education, and employment opportunities as they transition into civilian life. I will continue to advocate for these priorities in the House of Representatives.

Veterans and their families face a unique set of challenges. While Congress has made progress in the past ten years by increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) funding by over 77 percent, there is still more work to do. I look forward to working with community members and my colleagues in Congress to improve the lives of our veterans and to ensure they are adequately cared for.

Again, thank you to all our nation's veterans and their families for their service to our nation.

Sincerely,

Member of Congress

Update on Adam's Work In Congress

It is Congress' responsibility to provide veterans with access to quality benefits, assistance programs, and medical treatment for veterans. Adam is honored to represent thousands of veterans in the Puget Sound region and it is a top priority of his to ensure veterans are receiving all the benefits they have earned and deserve.

Adam shares many veterans' concerns with the current VA disability claims backlog. Despite the VA's efforts to modernize and increase efficiencies, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have created a generation of new veterans.

Today, over 420,000 veterans are waiting for their disability claims to be processed. The average wait for a first time disability claim ranges from 312 days and 327 days, but in some of the worst cases it can take over 800 days. In the last four years, claims that have been waiting for over a year have grown by 2000% despite an increase in the VA's budget. We need to solve this problem. Earlier this year, Adam signed a letter to President Obama requesting that he take direct action in ending the current backlog, and also supported legislation to create a task force focused on reducing the backlog. He also supported \$136.2 million in funding for the Veterans Claims Intake Program, which moves the VA towards a digital health record system to improve the claims backlog.



Adam attended the renaming of Veterans Drive in Kent, Washington. Photo Credit: Steve Hunter/ Kent Reporter

Adam is also working to make it easier for transitioning veterans to find good employment. He cosponsored the Veteran Employment Transition Act which makes permanent the work opportunity tax credit for qualified veterans. The bill also requires the Secretaries of Labor, VA, and DOD to work together to govern the coordination of Veteran job training services. Additionally, Adam supported \$84.6 billion for the Veterans Benefits Administration which covers veteran pensions, compensation, education assistance, and work training programs, all of which make it easier for transitioning veterans.

For years, Adam has fought for equal treatment for same-sex military spouses. This year he reintroduced the Military Spouse Equal Treatment Act, which would ensure that all active duty and Veterans' spouses receive equal benefits. He believes that no one should be denied rights because of who they love. Following the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), this bill can now become a reality. Adam will continue to fight to make sure that all spouses receive equal treatment.

Work in the Community



*Adam visits with our troops in the Middle East.
Photo Credit: ISAF Legislative Affairs*

When Adam is back home in the 9th District, he frequently meets with veteran organizations and listens to their needs and concerns. Below are a few examples of meetings and events that Adam has participated in recently.

In August, Adam visited the VA hospital on Beacon Hill for a tour and met with the new Director of the VA Puget Sound Health Care System, Mr. Michael J. Murphy. Adam and his staff stay in consistent contact with leadership at the VA Puget Sound to monitor service levels and find ways that Congress can craft policy to improve the delivery of care at the hospital.

This spring, Adam was honored to attend the 68th Annual Nisei Veterans Committees' Memorial Day Service at Lake View Cemetery in Seattle. Over 200 community members attended the touching event that recognizes those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the fundamental

freedoms that all Americans enjoy. In June, Adam also held a veterans town hall in conjunction with the VFW Post 5760 at the historic Keewaydin Clubhouse on Mercer Island. Adam learned about members' thoughts on veterans issues, along with a wide range of important problems facing the country today. Additionally, he spoke at a ceremony in Kent renaming South 231st Way to Veterans Drive, a reflection of Kent's commitment to honor its proud military history and the tremendous service of our military.

Committee Leadership

Major concerns have been raised as to why the two departments have failed to achieve greater integration of their systems related to transitioning service members. As the Ranking Member of HASC, Congressman Smith helped lead a Joint Hearing with the Committee on Veterans Affairs that focused on improving collaboration between the VA and DOD to assist service members returning to civilian life. The hearing brought together leaders in both agencies and a critical discussion of how to achieve common goals.

With his leadership role on HASC, the Congressman also travels overseas to visit with our troops frequently. This August, he traveled to the Jordan-Syria border and visited with refugees who had fled Syria, and then traveled to Afghanistan for an update on our troops there. Visiting troops in combat gives the Congressman a unique perspective on the needs of our men and women in uniform.



*Adam visits troops in Afghanistan in August.
Photo Credit: ISAF Legislative Affairs*

Assisting with VA Benefits and Claims

Adam recognizes that navigating the VA system can be a daunting process that can leave people feeling lost and frustrated. It does not have to be that way. Adam and his staff can assist you by providing resources to be better informed, connect you with Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) who can help you through the process, and make sure your applications and filings have been received. Our office has been successful in assisting many veterans who had concerns regarding their VA benefits. We encourage Veterans to call our office to get questions answered or to seek assistance.

Our office's assistance to Veterans is not limited to VA benefits. Just recently, Adam helped WWII Veteran and 9th District resident Clayton Pitre tour the new USNS Montford Point boat. The boat is named after Montford Point Camp, where 20,000 African American Marine recruits were trained during the 1940s. Mr. Pitre was one of the first African American Marines trained at Montford, and asked for a tour of the boat. Adam and staff worked with the U.S. Navy who graciously arranged a tour for Mr. Pitre.

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