

Veterans

Congressman Gregorio Kili Camacho Sablan | Representing the People of the Northern Mariana Islands



Starting with the feasibility study he added to the National Defense Authorization Act of 2011, Congressman Sablan has worked to expand the Saipan troop store for veterans, active duty service members, and their families. Army and Air Force Exchange Service Pacific Commander Colonel Scott Maskery and Senior Enlisted Advisor Sergeant Major Arnaldo Muniz gave the Congressman a status update at the soft opening in August.

Greetings!



We in the Marianas are so proud of our veterans. All Americans are proud of our veterans. Yet we do not always give veterans the help they earned and need. Returning home after military service can be a difficult mental adjustment for them and require expert guidance. Living with the wounds of war is a physical challenge and can require specialized care over a lifetime.

In the last nine years as your Congressman, many veterans—and their families—have come to their congressional office for help. And I have become more and more aware of the many problems they face. So, in this Congress, I decided

to do more. I asked for and received a waiver from the normal two-committee limit and added the work of a third committee, Veterans' Affairs, to my responsibilities.

As part of this determination to do more for veterans in the Marianas, your congressional office has put together this Report. We want to bring our veterans—and the public at large—up to date on the work we are doing in Congress and here in the Marianas to make life better for the men and women who served.

Wili

Expanded troop store now open

The 4,000 service members, veterans, and their dependents in the Northern Marianas began using their new, expanded, and much improved AAFES Troop Store in August. But it took years of work.

First, Congressman Sablan had to add an economic feasibility study to the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act to justify the project. Once the study proved expansion was feasible in 2013, ground-breaking was scheduled. But concerns about clearing unexploded ordnance on the site caused further delay.

Now, finally, the expanded Army and Air Force Exchange Service troop store on Saipan is open. The \$2.8 million project expanded the store from 1,120 square-feet to 5,000 square-feet, making room for more shelf space, more electronics and appliances, even a snack station.



All honorably discharged veterans also have access to online exchanges. Learn more at www.militaryonesource.mil/commissary-exchange.



The bigger, better AAFES troop store opened in August.

It is a big change from when Congressman Sablan first came to office. The store was undersized and falling apart. Constituents complained it was understocked, merchandise selection was highly limited, and shipments to replenish supplies were infrequent. So, the Congressman went to work.

Fully operational today, an official grand opening of the expanded AAFES Troop Store is expected early in 2018.

Library of Congress collecting vets' stories

Marianas Veterans are now adding their personal stories to the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress. Your congressional office brought news of the Project to vets here and even arranged for Library staff to travel to the Marianas to train local volunteers how to interview vets, and collect their letters, photos, diaries, and other mementos to add to the national collection.

Since 2000, when Congress began the Project, 100,000 veterans' stories have been gathered nationwide, spanning U.S. military history from World War I to the Afghan War. The stories include some 4,400 from veterans who served in Guam and the Northern Marianas.



The congressional office has recorded interviews with five local veterans so far and sent the recordings, along with personal memorabilia the veterans were willing to donate, to the Library of Congress.

The office is working with the Public School System and with the Northern Marianas Humanities Council to interview more veterans and collect their materials for preservation.

For more information on how veterans can participate or how to volunteer to conduct interviews contact your congressional office. To read the stories collected by the Veterans History Project visit www.loc.gov/vets.

More healthcare choices for vets

Local veterans now have more “Choice” in getting health care. Instead of having to travel to an official Veterans Affairs medical facility off-island, veterans can now get the help they need from non-VA health providers right here in the Northern Marianas.

To make this possible, Congressman Sablan added language to the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act in 2014. He specified that the new Veterans Choice Program, as it is called, should be available to any veteran who has to travel by air or by sea to reach a VA medical facility. Sablan’s addition to the law made veterans on Rota, Tinian, or Saipan automatically eligible to get care from a non-VA provider with payment through Choice.

Even though the program launched in the Pacific islands in 2015, veterans and local providers in the Marianas were largely unaware, so Sablan worked to spread the word. (see *TriWest CEO explains Choice*).

As a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee, Sablan has also worked to keep the program going beyond its original August 2017 sunset date. This July, the committee, Senate counterparts, and the White House hammered out a deal to provide \$3.9 billion for Choice short-term, allowing more time for Congress to make the program permanent.

To learn more about the Veterans Choice Program, visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/.

HELP US HELP YOU

Why apply for benefits?

- **Get the services you earned.** Receive healthcare, education and other benefits.
- **Be counted.** Your application lets the VA know the number of veterans needing assistance in the Marianas, helping them plan for care and services to our islands.



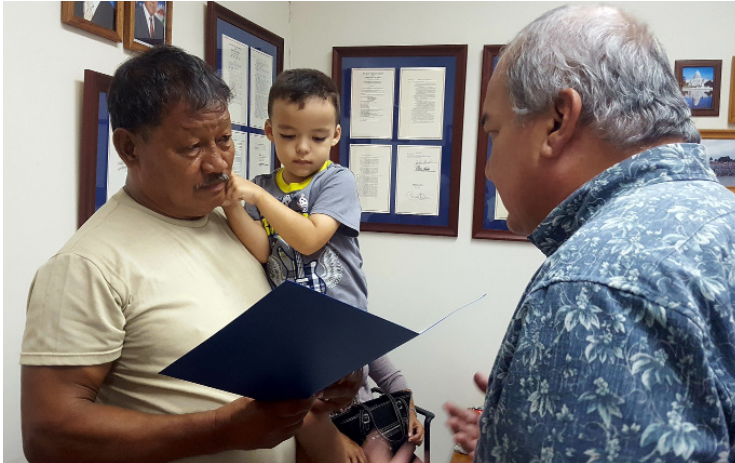
To apply,
visit www.vets.gov
or call 1-877-222-VETS (8387)

Kilili joins Veterans' Affairs Committee



Getting a special waiver to the normal two-committee rule, Congressman Sablan took a seat on the House Veterans Affairs' Committee, his third committee assignment in the 115th Congress. This means Marianas veterans now have a voice where it counts, speaking for them and focusing on their specific needs and those of their families. The move has already paid off. At Sablan's request, Chairman Phil Roe, M.D. has agreed to hold a hearing in 2018 on how to help veterans in the Marianas and other insular areas.

Vietnam veterans honored



In addition to ceremonies on Saipan and Tinian, Sablan held a separate meeting on Rota with Vietnam veterans and their family members, when he presented them with the congressional tribute.

TriWest CEO explains Choice

Congressman Sablan invited TriWest to the Marianas in August to increase awareness and use of the Veterans Choice Program. The company manages Choice for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

TriWest CEO David McIntyre met with about 80 veterans and family members and with 50 healthcare providers on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

As a result of this outreach, the number of providers signed up with TriWest to accept veterans tripled. There are now some 70 providers Commonwealth-wide—at the hospital on Saipan, the Rota and Tinian Health Centers, Kagman Community Health Center, and a dozen private clinics.

So, veterans have access to a wide range of primary and specialty care, physical therapy, eye care, and mental health services right here at home.

No referral from the Department of Veterans Affairs is necessary; and no co-pay, cost-share, or deductible is collected from the veteran.

To locate a participating Choice provider, visit www.va.gov/opa/apps/locator/index.html.

Soldiers, sailors, and airmen often returned home from the Vietnam War without fanfare or thanks. That is changing for Vietnam vets in the Marianas.

On the last two Veterans Days, Congressman Sablan has given out presentation copies of his tribute in the Congressional Record to those in the Marianas who served in Vietnam. Seventy local vets have received the tribute.

“It’s been 52 years since the conflict ended in Vietnam, and our gratitude to those who served is long overdue,” Sablan said.

During the ceremonies, the four from the Northern Marianas who died during the Vietnam war were honored as well.

Vietnam veterans or their surviving family members who have not received a copy of the tribute should contact one of the congressional offices.

“These tributes are a way of honoring and thanking Vietnam veterans for their service. They are also a way of saying: welcome home.”

- Congressman Kili Sablan

Vets, help us send our best to a service academy

A prestigious route to military service is congressional nomination and acceptance at one of the U.S. service academies—the Naval Academy at Annapolis, the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, the Military Academy at West Point.

And the opportunities for young people from the Marianas to be accepted keep growing.

In his first term, Congressman Sablan doubled the number of academy positions reserved for the Marianas from one to two at each institution. Again, in 2015, he increased Marianas’ slots from two to three.

Four openings are available for admission in the 2018-2019 school year: two at the U.S. Military Academy, one at the Naval Academy, and one at the Air Force Academy. In addition, the Marianas has a slot open each year at the Merchant Marine Academy.

Veterans, who know high school seniors, college students, or active duty military with the leadership skills, physical abilities, and academic qualifications to be good candidates, should encourage these individuals to apply for a congressional nomination.

More information and applications for nomination are available at the congressional office website, sablan.house.gov, and at the district offices on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

VETERANS RESOURCE DIRECTORY NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

A listing of services available to veterans of the
Northern Mariana Islands

Available at
sablan.house.gov

Shulkin and Sablan work together

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. David J. Shulkin, M.D., visited the Capitol Hill office in May to discuss what his Department can do for veterans in the Marianas. Congressman Sablan had recently completed a series of listening sessions with veterans and hosted Resource Fairs on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. So, he knew well what Marianas veterans need.

Sablan explained that his veterans lacked a Community-Based Outreach Clinic with full-time VA doctors and staff to provide primary care medical services. At present, the VA-contracted clinic with two part-time, private physicians has

reached capacity and is unable to take more veteran patients.

Marianas veterans also need a full-time mental health professional. Veterans are not satisfied with the impersonal nature and high staff turn-over of the video counseling now available.

Infrequent visits by Guam-based VA staff is a problem, too, and makes it hard for Marianas veterans to access benefits they have earned.

Shulkin promised to work on these concerns. As a start, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker position has now been approved for the Marianas.



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON
June 1, 2017

Secretary Shulkin affirmed his support for Marianas veterans in a letter after his meeting with Congressman Sablan.

The Honorable Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Sablan:

Thank you for our productive meeting on May 23. I value your support and insights on the significant challenges facing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Your engagement helped reinforce our shared commitment to advancing Veterans issues. As a follow-up to the important issues you raised, a member of my staff will contact your staff regarding the lack of Community-Based Outpatient Clinics and the need for a Vet Center in Northern Marianas Islands.

I look forward to working closely with you to improve VA and make a difference for our Nation's Veterans.

Sincerely,


David J. Shulkin, M.D.

By the way I removed all of the letters you gave me and it helped me understand a lot better - Thank you DL



Congressman Sablan briefs Dr. David Shulkin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, on the difficulties Northern Marianas veterans have accessing health care and the other benefits earned through their service.



Congressional office hosts Veterans Resource Fairs. More than 150 veterans, servicemen and women, and their family members, along with over 30 service providers, took part in the first-ever Veterans Resource Fairs on Saipan, Tinian and Rota in February. The congressional office hosted the Fairs, bringing federal and local veteran service organizations together in one place, to help veterans connect with the many resources available to them.

Wounded Warrior Fellow joins congressional office

Congratulations to Marine Corps veteran Randy Takai Johnson who has been selected to be a Congressional Wounded Warrior Fellow in the Northern Marianas office.

Only a few Members of Congress are chosen to be part of the Wounded Warrior Fellows program, which is operated by the Chief Administrative Officer of the U.S. House of Representatives. The fellowship is awarded specifically to Congressman Sablan and could continue for up to two years.

Johnson served in the Marines from 2003 to 2007. This included two tours in Iraq as a combat engineer, detecting improvised explosive devices and participating in various combat operations. He earned the Purple Heart for wounds received in the line of duty.

After discharge, he completed a bachelor's degree in Information Technology, then returned home to the Marianas.

Johnson has worked for the Northern Marianas Chapter of the American Red Cross. He assisted the recovery from Super typhoon Soudelor and coordinated the chapter's data system.

He has a passion for public service and looks forward to assisting fellow veterans and their families in the Northern Marianas through his work. His duty station is the Saipan congressional office, where he will be the primary point of contact for veteran constituents.



Randy Takai Johnson

This mailing was prepared, published and mailed at taxpayer expense.



On Veterans Day, the Marianas joined the nation in recognizing the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War and paying tribute to Vietnam era veterans. Congress authorized this commemoration in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008. For a second year, I presented the veterans my statement in the Congressional Record, honoring their service and sacrifice. Vietnam veterans or surviving family members, who have not received the tribute, may contact their congressional office.

Contact Congressman Gregorio Kili Camacho Sablan

Toll Free: (877) 446-3465 | Email: kilili@mail.house.gov

Saipan District Office
P.O. Box 504879
Saipan, MP 96950
(670) 323-2647/8

Rota District Office
P.O. Box 1361
Rota, MP 96951
(670) 532-2647

Tinian District Office
P.O. Box 520394
Tinian, MP 96952
(670) 433-2647

Washington, DC Office
2411 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-2646