

Since the tragic attacks on our country September 11th, I have met with hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life throughout my district in Oregon. We shared the stunned horror at the attack on our country and felt a renewed sense of pride in our nation.

Now is truly a time for America to be proud of the men and women who have been on the front line fighting against terrorism and other international threats throughout our country's history. We must honor the sacrifices of our service members and fulfill the sacred promises our government made to them. Further, we must assure that the services and benefits we promised are given to veterans after they finish their service.

My commitment to members of the armed forces is a top priority but sadly today, we are failing to provide veterans the complete benefits and services they have earned. While there is no easy fix, especially in these difficult economic times, there are some steps that we must take to improve the situation. One such step is to pass positive, pro-veterans legislation in Congress.

The following is a list of some of the veterans-related legislation that I have cosponsored this session:

- **Concurrent receipt:**

H.R. 303, the Retired Pay Restoration Act, allows veterans over 65 with service-connected disabilities who served 20 years or more to receive both their military retired pay and compensation to substitute for diminution of earning capacity. Military retirees are the only group of federal retirees who must waive retirement pay in order to receive VA disability compensation.

- **Oregon's Veterans' Home Loan Program:**

H.R. 959 allows states with federally assisted veteran home loan programs to determine their own eligibility criteria. This legislation removes the discriminatory portion of the Internal Revenue Code so that post-1976 veterans and their families can enjoy the same benefits as their earlier counterparts. This would benefit state veterans' home loan initiatives, including Oregon's successful program.

- **Use of Veterans' Organizations' Facilities:**

H.R. 1754 fixes a problem with the Internal Revenue Code regarding use of veteran's

organizations' facilities by members and their families. Right now, not all veterans' organizations are able to take full advantage of their posts' tax-exempt status. This bill enables them to do so.

- **Persian Gulf War Illness:**

H.R. 612, the Persian Gulf War Illness Compensation Act, requires the Veterans Administration to recognize that veterans are suffering from Gulf War Illness if they have one or more of the symptoms and served in the Gulf.

If there are other bills that you think would help veterans, please contact my office and share your thoughts with me. You can write to my Portland office, 516 SE Morrison Street, Suite 250, Portland, Oregon, 97214 or call 503-231-2300.

While some of us in Congress continue to push for legislation to benefit veterans and improve funding levels for veterans programs, people in Oregon are also making a huge difference. I recently worked with Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 392 and the Oregon Department of Transportation to name Highway 205 the "Veterans Memorial Highway" in honor of all veterans who have served our nation. Over one hundred thousand people a day travel this road, which passes by Oregon's largest veterans' cemetery, Willamette National Cemetery. Naming the highway in honor of veterans and prominently displaying the new name is a significant way to remind people of the sacrifices veterans made for our freedom.

This year, my office worked with more than a hundred veterans to navigate government procedures, which can often be confusing and frustrating. Caseworkers on my staff helped veterans by cutting through a myriad of departments, red tape and bureaucracy. This assistance has helped veterans in my community receive medical benefits, vital records, and other veteran-related services. Additionally, my office nominated many young men and women to be considered for an appointment to one of four military academies. The student's nominations will now go to the academies for further consideration and final selected nominees will begin classes next fall. This is truly an exciting opportunity for an outstanding group of young Oregonians!

I offer my sincere thanks to the men and women of Oregon who have answered the call of duty throughout our nation's history. Because of you, the United States of America is the beacon of freedom and hope for the entire world. I appreciate the many years of outstanding service the Veterans of Foreign Wars has provided Oregon's veterans. I look forward to working with you on these issues and many others in the New Year.