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2022 Veterans Report

from Congressman Ed Case

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November 2022

From my office and me to our Hawaii's 110,000-plus veterans and your 'ohana, aloha!
As we again honor your service on Veterans Day and I complete the current 117th Congress and prepare for the upcoming 118th Congress (2023-25), I report back to you further on some of my activities in Congress on behalf of our nation's veterans and seek your guidance.

With veteran at Memorial Day services at Cambridge American Cemetery, United Kingdom

Administration and Funding of Our Veterans Programs

I continue to focus on improving and fully funding our federal veterans health, education, business and other programs. I especially work through my U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, responsible for all federal discretionary funding, and our Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies, where I'm completing my fourth year.

For the current fiscal year, I worked again to deliver on foundation programs for all veterans and to enhance efforts for our veterans in most need in areas such as mental health, suicide prevention, substance abuse, women's health and homelessness. My Hawai'i-specific initiatives included:

- Directing the VA to address the parking shortage at Tripler.
- Maintaining Congressional oversight of the construction of the new Akaka VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in West O'ahu.
- Working with the VA to expand tele-health options like the Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations Program that allows veterans to securely access VA care in their home communities.

I also helped secure general program funding including:

- $2.7 billion for the VA's homeless assistance programs.
- $840 million for gender-specific care and programs for women.
- $308 million for Rural Health Initiatives to build on VA's success in having served 2.9 million veterans in rural locations.

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The Honoring Our Promise To Address Comprehensive Toxins (PACT) Act

The just-enacted PACT Act, which I cosponsored, is landmark legislation to secure care for the 3.5 million veterans exposed to deadly toxins in the line of duty.

The VA has begun honoring claims reflecting the twenty-three new conditions and cancers that now qualify for presumptive service-connected eligibility for VA benefits. Veterans can access the list of qualifying conditions at https://www.va.gov/pact. If you qualify, you should file a claim immediately. More information is available at https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/. My office can help with questions and further information (see below).

With 1st Lt. Donovan Sebastian of Wailuku and Spc. Raphael Garlitos of Kea'au at Pabrade Training Camp, Lithuania

The PACT Act included a measure long championed by my predecessor and friend, the late U.S. Congressman K. Mark Takai, a proud Guardsman himself. Entitled the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act, it allows veterans who participated in the atomic testing and cleanup in the Marshall Islands to receive the same health care and benefits provided to other veterans affected by our nuclear tests. Congressman Takai deserves our posthumous gratitude.

Veterans Mental Health, Disability Assistance and Fraud Protection

In our veterans health programs, we have too often not fully understood and provided adequately for mental health conditions, diagnosis and treatment and for related effects including poverty, homeless, and substance abuse disorder. This is true throughout our Hawai'i as well, as I experienced firsthand most recently on a back-home outreach to the U.S. Vets facility in Kalaeloa, where I listened to veterans who have experienced homelessness and other struggles.

On Capitol Hill, we have both increased targeted funding and directed improved or new programs to deliver updated and expanded care matching advances in recognition and treatment. One recent law is the Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act, which I co-sponsored, after Sgt. Brandon Ketchum who tragically died by suicide in 2016 after being denied access to mental health care.

Onboard USS Essex at sea south of O'ahu with Ensign Madison Kwok of Kaimuki

This law establishes three new mental health programs for veterans and focuses VA on improving mental health care for more areas where care is more difficult to access and deliver.

I also fully supported another new law, the Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, which will increase the amounts payable for wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. Specifically, VA must increase the amounts by the same percentage (8.7%) as the cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social Security recipients that is effective on December 1, 2022.

To protect VA benefits, I co-sponsored H.R. 8736, the GUARD VA Benefits Act. This measure will reinstate criminal penalties for unaccredited claims representatives who break the law by charging unauthorized fees to assist veterans in filing VA benefit claims. Veterans receiving compensation benefits are prime targets for such fraudsters. One fraud is "pension poaching," used by advisors who charge "consulting" fees upwards of five times the amount of any retroactive benefits compensation received. Our measure would enhance VA's and other federal agencies' ability to protect veterans from fraudulent and predatory practices.

Assisting You and Yours With Your Own Veterans Issues

One of my most critical responsibilities is assisting my constituents with your own issues, especially with our federal government. This year alone, we have assisted some 3,000 constituents on individual matters. Many of these questions and concerns are about federal veterans programs, especially health, housing and other benefits and service records. My commitment is to assist however I can, including getting answers and action from my federal partners. In doing so, I also gain invaluable insights into how our veterans programs are working back home and where I need to focus in Congress on improvements for all veterans. If you or a fellow veteran or anyone else you know needs help, whether or not veterans related, please visit my website at https://case.house.gov/forms/casework, contact me at ed.case@mail.house.gov or call my Honolulu office at (808) 650-6688.

Asking For Your Continued Guidance; November 28th Virtual Veterans Roundtable

My efforts in Congress for you and your fellow veterans and 'ohana are only as good as my staying closely connected with you and your organizations, and I need and ask for your kōkua in keeping that connection strong. You can especially help by sharing this newsletter and my offer of assistance with your fellow veterans (you can forward an electronic copy from https://case.house.gov/newsletters/).

I'm also **hosting another virtual Veterans Roundtable Monday, November 28th, at 11AM Hawai'i time.** I'll be joined by guests to talk through veterans issues in more detail. We'll livestream it on Facebook Live (see details below). You can ask questions online then or email them now or then to me at ed.case@mail.house.gov.

Please go to https://case.house.gov for further information on my efforts, and sign up for regular updates through my e-newsletter and social media at https://case.house.gov/contact. We truly welcome your questions and comments on any matter.

It is a deep honor and serious responsibility to represent and serve you and yours in Congress, and I humbly thank you again for your service.

Mahalo,

Ed Case

Congressman Ed Case –
Hawai'i-First District

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