

IOWA DEMOCRATIC VETERANS' CAUCUS

Policy Statement

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Contact: Bob Krause - 641-469-3389

Kent Sovern - 515-255-0776



Four Points of Honor

Democrats Bring Focus to Veteran's Issues

PRIORITY POSITIONS OF THE IOWA DEMOCRATIC VETERANS' CAUCUS

1. VETERANS HEALTH CARE COSTS AND BUDGETS

Resolution:

The Iowa Democratic Veterans' Caucus supports mandatory federal funding for veterans' health care for all veterans

Discussion:

The national budget for veterans' health care is wholly inadequate in order to fund services for veterans injured in America's most recent wars. Through a series of bureaucratic regulations the Department of Veterans Affairs and other elements of the Bush administration have chosen to eliminate benefit eligibility for soldiers that have fought in previous wars. The most serious of these cutbacks has been the creation of a ranked or tiered structure for veterans' eligibility as created and effected by then-Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi. This major cutback effectively denies veterans' health care benefits to most or all of the bottom four tiers of veterans in an eight-tier system. While we recognize that our more-recent Iraq and Afghanistan veterans need and are entitled to immediate assistance and given that we support the full funding of their needs, we do not agree that those less recent veterans that have already sacrificed should have their contractual benefits abridged.

State Communications Liaison
1534 Germania Drive
Des Moines, IA 50311-2631

Phone: 515-255-0776
E-mail: k.sovern@mchsi.com
<http://vets.meetup.com/39/>

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America must come to recognize that the veterans' health care budget crisis is as significant and important as both the Medicare and Medicaid health care crisis. The cost for veterans' health care is projected to increase multi-fold because of the unique injuries associated with our current wars thereby compounding the problems of chronic under funding of the veterans' care system. Great human suffering and distraught social consequences have been created in the past by the failure of our government to identify and treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) injuries in a timely and professional manner. PTSD has affected entire generations of soldiers. It has affected those who served in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Operation Just Cause in Panama, various Korean actions, Kosovo, Desert One, and Somalia. It has effected and is affecting our more recent Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. It will continue to impact the lives of veterans. Therefore, veterans' health care budgets must be dramatically expanded. Not only are our veterans affected, but it impacts their parents, children, spouses, employers, and the acquaintances of our veterans.

2. VETERANS ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Resolution:

It is the unwavering position of the Iowa Democratic Veterans' Caucus that the Veterans Administration (VA) health care provisions are a contractual agreement earned by veterans. As such, we insist that financial means testing, co-pay and any or all other devices utilized to exclude or limit veterans' health care benefits be rescinded.

Discussion:

Our government and its representatives in order to reduce the budget impact of providing health care for veterans use various forms of means testing. This marginalizes and falsely indicates that a particular veteran's service to our country is less valuable than the service of another veteran. It is our position that health care services and other benefits are earned through sacrifice and should not be subject to means testing or other economic restrictions. These earned benefits should be universally available to veterans.

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3. EQUITY FOR RESERVE AND GUARD VETERANS

Resolution:

The Iowa Democratic Veterans' Caucus is deeply troubled and concerned that both Reserve and National Guard veterans are treated differently under the terms of the Montgomery GI Bill than are active or Regular Armed Services veterans. We call on each Democratic presidential candidate and each member of the Iowa Congressional delegation to review the status of veterans' educational benefits for the Reserve and Guard and bring them to parity with the educational benefits of Regular Armed Services veterans.

Discussion:

Recently veterans of the 133rd Infantry Battalion of the Iowa Army National Guard were denied full educational benefits under the Montgomery GI Bill. This occurred because orders were issued indicating guardsmen's active duty status was one day short of the threshold that would have allowed full educational benefits. This situation represents the utilization of regulations and orders as a budget saving means or device at the expense of an affected veteran who may be seeking earned educational assistance benefits. This "discrepancy" occurred in spite of the fact that the Iowa unit affected was involved in the longest recorded in-theater duty of the war.

This situation represents a common practice in many instances. There are other examples of Reserve and Guard soldiers serving two, three, four and even five one-year tours in Iraq or Afghanistan where breaks in active service have occurred between rotations. Had these soldiers been on active service, they might have been eligible for full educational benefits several times over.

What constitutes being a Veteran is specifically defined. All Veterans have taken risk by taking the oath, regardless of time of war or time of peace. A soldier is always on call to perform dangerous missions. Many Veterans often go unnoticed and are recognized either too late or never for their participation in small combat actions, which are equally as dangerous as a full-declared war, or for the larger scale battles as well. Soldiers keeping the peace in distant lands face separation from family and loved ones, as well as physical hardship, regardless of when their service was rendered.

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4. VETERANS' SPECIAL MEDICAL NEEDS

Resolution:

The Iowa Democratic Veterans' Caucus supports increased emphasis on the provision of and delivery of medical special needs for all Veterans.

These special needs include services for the following physiological and psychological service-related injuries and disabilities:

1. Mental Disorders (with particular emphasis placed upon and directed toward PTSD)
2. Medical and mental health services specific to Women Veterans
3. Traumatic Brain Injury,
4. Orthopedic injuries and amputation services.

Discussion:

The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have magnified the necessity of special health care needs for all veterans not just the needs of the Veterans of our latest conflict. The preceding categories of medical special care needs are in need of particular emphasis immediately.

For more information you can contact the IDVC Communications Liaison Kent Sovern via email at k.sovern@mchsi.com or visit the IDVC web site at <http://vets.meetup.com/39/>.

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