

This Memorial Day, I want to extend a personal thank you to all the Troops, Veterans and Military Families who have so bravely served our country and sacrificed for our nation. I recently mailed the following letter to veterans in my district and am proud to share it with you here.

Please click here to [download a copy of the letter](#) .

The text of the letter is below:

May 30, 2011

Dear Friend,

As we honor and celebrate the bravery and sacrifices of our nation's armed forces and veterans this Memorial Day, I want to thank you for your service to our country.

As your Congresswoman, I am working hard to ensure you receive the care and benefits that you deserve. This is particularly important as new veterans return home from our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and Americans face the toughest economic climate in decades. I am proud that under four years of Democratic leadership from 2007 to 2011, Congress produced historic gains for America's Troops, Veterans, and Military Families by passing legislation that affected

nearly every veteran in America.

It is my priority to ensure you not only have access to a comprehensive array of benefits and tools to help navigate civilian life, but that you receive these benefits in a timely fashion. Since 2007, Congress has provided funding for the addition of over 10,000 new claims processors at Veteran Affairs (VA) Regional Offices across the country in an attempt to streamline the rating process. Congress retroactively provided more than 185,000 service members and veterans with \$500 every month they were forced to serve under stop-loss orders since 2001.

I also worked to provide long overdue disability benefits to more than 150,000 Vietnam veterans and survivors for exposure to Agent Orange and we pushed the VA to expand their regulations pertaining to contact with Agent Orange. Lastly, we gave troops a pay raise of 3.5 percent in 2008 and 3.9 percent in 2009—larger than President Bush's budget in both years. In 2010 we raised the pay of active duty military personnel by another 3.4 percent.

Recognizing that the composition of our armed services is rapidly changing, I supported the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act when it passed the House in the 111th Congress. The legislation removed barriers to women veterans seeking health care. For the first time in our history, the VA will pay for the care of newborn children and their mothers for up to seven days after birth. This legislation also enhanced treatment for sexual trauma for women at the VA.

Congress has created innovative programs to incentivize the hiring of veterans and ensure that the transition to civilian life for our returning service personnel is as smooth as possible. We provided businesses a \$2,400 tax credit for hiring unemployed veterans, increased job opportunities with veterans' on-the-job training in the energy sector, ensured fairness to veteran-owned small businesses in federal contracts and provided a new Post-9/11 GI Bill that promises a full, four-year college education for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and their families.

The Post-9/11 GI Bill pays tuition and fees directly to the school for up to the maximum undergraduate in-state tuition and fees at a public institution in your state. The legislation also includes the Yellow Ribbon Program which assists veterans who wish to obtain education from a private or out-of-state institution. The new GI Bill pays for a monthly housing allowance prorated to a student's rate of attendance based on the location of the school and pays an annual stipend to veterans to purchase books and supplies. For our men and women who were members of the Armed Forces on August 1, 2009, the Department of Defense is offering an opportunity to transfer your education benefits to your spouse or dependent children.

My colleagues and I are also continuing our work to help Veterans avoid homelessness. The effort to combat veteran homelessness has gained broad support at the federal, state and local levels and among many private sector organizations. Congress allocated money to the VA for a nearly \$400 million investment in 2009 to serve over 35,000 veterans and more than 5,000 spouses and children to avoid homelessness. In 2010, the VA allocated \$39 million to fund 2,200 new transitional housing beds nation-wide.

As the heroes of our country, we believe our veterans and their families deserve the very best to ensure peace of mind. I pledge to continue to do my part to make sure all of our veterans receive the awards they earn from their service to our country. Once again I would like to thank you all for your courage and your commitment to protecting the American people. As your Congresswoman I represent you with great honor and will continue to work with your best interest in mind. Please contact one of my offices if you have any questions or concerns.