

N.M. VETERANS NEWSLETTER



**LEGISLATIVE
UPDATE**

FOR NEW MEXICO'S VETERANS



DEAR FRIEND,

New Mexico has one of the highest rates of military volunteerism in the nation. As your senior senator, I am proud of this distinction and committed to delivering and strengthening quality health care and benefits for New Mexico veterans.

I am honored to serve as the Chairman of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee. In this role, I fight for the resources and funding the U.S. Department of Veterans (VA) needs to keep America's promise to our service members and their families. The latest VA funding bill includes groundbreaking investments in VA health care and research.

As Chairman of this Subcommittee, I also have an important oversight role and monitor the VA closely. That's why, as soon as the VA recommended closing community-based outpatient clinics (CBOCs) in Gallup, Las Vegas, Española, and Raton, I fought like hell. I invited VA Secretary Denis McDonough to New Mexico in June to tour these facilities and engage with local veterans and VA officials. He saw firsthand why it is so important to have veteran health care services in our rural communities. In the end, together with a bipartisan group of senators, I was successful in keeping these CBOCs open by stopping the Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission process from moving forward in the Senate. This means these clinics are no longer in jeopardy of closing their doors, and rural veterans will continue to have access to VA services in their local communities.

I was also proud to get the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act passed into law this year. Under the PACT Act, generations of veterans who were exposed to toxins through their service will finally receive the VA health care and benefits that they have long deserved. That includes Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange, Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who were exposed to burn pits, Marines who served at Camp LeJeune and were exposed to contaminated water, and Cold War era veterans who were exposed to radiation.

Over the years, my office has helped hundreds of veterans across New Mexico access their care and benefits. If you or a family member is having trouble filing a claim with VA, receiving benefits, accessing health benefits or military records, replacing medals, or other veterans issues, you can contact my office by calling (505) 346-6601 or by visiting the Veterans Resources Center on my website, Heinrich.Senate.Gov.

In this newsletter, you'll learn more about my work to ensure veterans have access to all the services that they have earned. I remain fully committed to keeping America's promise to our state's heroic veterans and their families. Thank you for your service and sacrifice.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator

HONORING OUR VETERANS

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS HEATH ROBINSON HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS (PACT) ACT.

Many veterans carry wounds that are not always visible, and can take time to appear. For decades, veterans exposed to toxic materials and chemicals have been suffering without proper recognition from VA. Now, with the PACT Act, we are making the most significant expansion of benefits and services for toxic-exposed veterans in more than 30 years. This is a huge step for the VA that will impact thousands of veterans in New Mexico.

This legislation is named in honor of Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson, a decorated combat medic, who died from a rare form of lung cancer linked to toxic exposure during his service. This historic legislation will help deliver more timely benefits and services to over 3.5 million veterans who may have been impacted by toxic exposures while serving our country.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich at PACT Act Press Conference, Washington D.C., June 16, 2022

THE PACT ACT

- Expands VA health care eligibility to Post-9/11 combat veterans, which includes more than 3.5 million toxic-exposed veterans;
- Creates a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure;
- Adds 23 burn pit and toxic exposure-related conditions to VA's list of service presumptions, including hypertension;
- Expands presumptions related to Agent Orange exposure; Includes Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Guam, American Samoa, and Johnston Atoll as locations for Agent Orange exposure;
- Strengthens federal research on toxic exposure;
- Improves VA's resources and training for toxic-exposed veterans; and
- Sets VA and veterans up for success by investing in: VA claims processing; VA's workforce; and VA health care facilities

If you're a Veteran or survivor, you can file claims now to apply for PACT Act-related benefits. To learn more please visit <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/> or call 1-800-698-2411 (TTY: 711). You can also visit my website, Heinrich.Senate.Gov, for help with a VA claim, PACT Act-related claim, GI Bill benefits, and more.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich at PACT Act Press Conference, Washington D.C., August 2, 2022

EVENTS

VETERANS RESOURCE FAIR

My office recently hosted a Veterans Resource Fair in Edgewood to assist veterans and their families in our community access the benefits and care they are entitled to based on their military service.

If you are having trouble filing a claim, receiving benefits, accessing health benefits or military records, replacing medals, or other veterans issues, please contact my office by calling (505) 346-6601. You can also find additional information by visiting the Veterans Resources Center on my website, <https://www.heinrich.senate.gov/helping-you/veterans-resources>.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich meets with Las Vegas-area veterans. New Mexico, April 19, 2022

As your United States Senator, I am committed to keeping America's promise to all of our state's heroic veterans and their families by ensuring they receive the full benefits and care that they earned through their service.

VA SECRETARY DENIS MCDONOUGH VISITS NEW MEXICO

This June, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary McDonough accepted my invitation to visit VA facilities in New Mexico and engage with veterans across the state. I hoped to show Secretary McDonough how we could strengthen the benefits and care that we provide through the department, and the importance of maintaining our Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) in our rural communities.

Secretary McDonough started his visit at Santa Fe National Cemetery, and met with Director Victor Vasquez. Director Vasquez gave Secretary McDonough a tour of the final resting place of many of our nation's heroes, including Medal of Honor recipient USMC Captain Raymond G. Murphy, for which the Albuquerque VA Medical Center is named.

We also visited the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque to meet with Executive Director Robert McKenrick and discuss provider shortages and ways to improve veteran access to health care in light of COVID-19.

Secretary McDonough joined me at the Regional Veteran's Benefits Administration Office in Albuquerque to meet with Director Cesar Romero and his leadership team. Together, we identified ways to increase collaboration and outreach that ensures all eligible veterans in New Mexico can benefit from the PACT Act. We also heard from Frank Lucero, a 93-year-old WWII and Korean War Veteran who shared his experience about accessing VA benefits. It was an honor to thank him in person for his incredible service to this nation.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary McDonough meets with Mr. Frank Lucero, a 93 year old WWII and Korean War Veteran from Rio Rancho and Mr. Lucero's son. New Mexico, June 27, 2022

VA SECRETARY DENIS MCDONOUGH VISITS NEW MEXICO

Secretary McDonough also joined me for a tour of VA's CBOC in Gallup. We met with the facility director and discussed some of the challenges on recruiting and retaining physicians due to the local housing crisis. I look forward to working with local VA officials and Secretary McDonough to address and improve this issue. During the visit, I was pleased to share that through my efforts with a bipartisan group of senators to halt the AIR Commission, this facility will continue to remain open to local veterans.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary McDonough, New Mexico, June 27, 2022

While in Gallup, we also hosted a veteran's town hall with former Navajo Nation President Jonathon Nez, U.S. Representative Teresa Leger Fernández, and Indian Health Service (IHS) Director Roselyn Tso. We heard firsthand from Native veterans about challenges in accessing VA and IHS care. It was a productive conversation and I look forward to working with both VA and IHS to address these concerns. Secretary McDonough closed out the town hall by recognizing the Navajo Nation as the first Tribe to certify its own Veterans Service Officers. We wrapped up the Secretary's visit at the Gallup Indian Medical Center to see where many Native veterans access care in addition to the Gallup CBOC.

I'm grateful that Secretary McDonough made the trip to New Mexico to see our VA system for himself, and to hear from veterans about their experience. I look forward to working with Secretary McDonough to continue to make the VA the best it can be for our veterans.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary McDonough with Navajo Nation President Nez, and medical staff from the Gallup CBOC, New Mexico, June 27, 2022

AIR COMMISSION

Since the day the Department of Veterans Affairs released their Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission recommendations, I have been outspoken that closing down Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) that New Mexico veterans rely on is not an option.

I fought like hell every step of the way to keep the CBOCs in Gallup, Las Vegas, Española, and Raton open. On June 27, 2022, I was pleased to announce we succeeded in preventing this process from moving forward. By putting a halt to the AIR Commission process, CBOCs that provide quality health care to New Mexico veterans are no longer in jeopardy of closing. Throughout my time in the Senate, I have worked closely with these communities to open and support their CBOCs. These clinics are an example of what the VA has been doing right to meet the needs of veterans in rural areas.

Within the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Military Construction (MILCON), Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, I followed up on the success to halt the implementation of the AIR Commission by rescinding funding allocated for the commission. I also secured report language within the FY23 MILCON/VA Appropriations Bill that would prevent the closure of Veterans Affairs facilities.

I will continue to work with the VA and my colleagues in the Senate to ensure veterans across the United States are able to access the care they deserve.



PHOTO: PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich meets with Las Vegas-area veterans. New Mexico, April 19, 2022

CONSTITUENT SERVICES

THE SANCHEZ FAMILY

The Sanchez family reached out to me for help with obtaining a flag for their deceased father, Master Chief Ambrosio Sanchez. On July 1, 2021 their father was interred at Arlington National Cemetery. On the day of the funeral, there was a major thunderstorm and the Master Chief's flag was soaked by the rain. The funeral director offered to have the flag dried, flown at Arlington National Cemetery, refolded and shipped to the family. However, a year went by and the family had still not received the flag. After many unsuccessful attempts to retrieve the flag on their own, they contacted my office. My office worked with the Department of the Army to ensure the family finally received Master Chief Ambrosio Sanchez's flag.

“We would like to express our deepest gratitude Senator Heinrich and the staff for helping to find our father's burial flag.

The flag arrived at my home in Albuquerque the week of July 18. Having his flag returned is a blessing and it gives us closure for our dad.”

– The Sanchez family



PHOTO: Master Chief Ambrosio Sanchez

A TRUE HERO

HIROSHI

“HERSHEY” MIYAMURA

A second generation Japanese American, Hershey Miyamura first volunteered for the U.S. Army near the end of World War II. He did so at a time when many of his fellow Japanese Americans, and that includes his future wife, were detained in American internment camps. He served in the storied 442nd Infantry Regiment, which was composed of soldiers with Japanese ancestry and became one of the most decorated units in U.S. military history.

Following the start of the Korean War in 1950, the Army recalled Hershey, who had remained in the Reserves, back into active duty. During an overnight firefight from April 24–25, 1951, then-Corporal Miyamura covered the withdrawal of his entire company from advancing enemy forces as a machine gun squad leader. His selfless actions that night allowed all 16 of his men to withdraw safely before he was severely wounded and captured as a prisoner of war. Nearly two and a half years later, following his release and return to the United States, President Eisenhower presented him with the Congressional Medal of Honor in a ceremony at the White House.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich meets with Medal of Honor recipient Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura in Gallup, N.M., June 5, 2015.

A TRUE HERO

HIROSHI “HERSHEY” MIYAMURA

Hershey Miyamura’s lifelong dedication to his country never ceased. It continued long after his decorated military service ended. After he received his honorable discharge from the Army, Hershey opened up a service station along Route 66 in his hometown of Gallup, New Mexico. He remained active in his community until his dying days, advocating for his fellow veterans and inspiring young people with lectures on patriotism, on faith, and on service.

It was one of the greatest honors of my own public service career to work with Hershey to open up the VA’s Gallup Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and to join him for a tour of the site that is now the Gallup State Veterans Cemetery.



PHOTO: (From Left) U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich, Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Hiroshi “Hershey” Miyamura, and then-U.S. Representative Ben Ray Luján cut the ribbon at the grand opening of the VA’s Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Gallup, June 5, 2015.

In recent years, Hershey touched the lives of countless young people in Gallup during his regular visits with students at the local high school that is named in his honor. The Miyamura High School Patriots wear the colors purple and silver in honor of Hershey’s Purple Heart. And a bronze statue of Hershey in his Army uniform and wearing his Medal of Honor stands at the main entrance of Hiroshi Miyamura High School.

I hope that none of us will ever forget the profound example of humility and patriotism that Hershey left to each of us as his enduring legacy.

HOW CAN I HELP YOU?



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich hosts Bronze Medal Star Presentation to posthumously recognize Colonel Robert J. Fate, New Mexico, May 30, 2017.

MY OFFICE CAN HELP WITH:

- VA Claims
- Military Records
- Replacement Medals
- GI Bill Benefits
- VA Home Loans
- VA Health Benefits
- Survivor's Benefits

TO START A CASE WITH MY OFFICE:

Call My Office At (505) 346-6601 or fill out the Privacy Release Form on my Website: Heinrich.Senate.Gov



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich at Veteran Housing Oak Street Apartments, New Mexico, January 20, 2022



U.S. SENATOR MARTIN HEINRICH

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