

N.M. VETERANS NEWSLETTER

U.S. SENATOR MARTIN HEINRICH



SUMMER 2019

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

FOR NEW MEXICO'S VETERANS





COVER PHOTO: Medal Ceremony for Representative Eliseo Lee Alcon, March 21, 2019

DEAR FRIEND,

One of my most important responsibilities as your Senator is to keep America's promise to our service members and their families so that when our troops return home, they receive the recognition and benefits that they have earned. In March it was my honor to recognize a great New Mexican for his military and public service. Like for so many of his fellow Vietnam veterans, this recognition was long overdue.

New Mexico State Representative Eliseo Lee Alcon was drafted in 1969 and served as a combat medic in Vietnam. He spent a year on the battlefield working to save the lives of his fellow soldiers. But as he told my office, just before he boarded a plane back to the states, he asked about his service medals and was told, "Don't worry about it, you're getting out." He returned home without fanfare and the recognition he had earned. In the years afterward, Representative Alcon entered into a public service career, serving as both a municipal and magistrate judge. And he has served his constituents from Cibola and McKinley County in the New Mexico House of Representatives since 2008.

Representative Alcon asked for my assistance in obtaining his service medals. At a ceremony held in his home town of Milan, I was proud to present him with his Bronze Star and Army Commendation. He also received his Good Conduct, Vietnam Service Medal with three Bronze Stars, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation and Expert Badge with Auto Rifle Bar. These citations recognize Representative Alcon's distinguished achievements and his bravery on the battlefield. These medals are nearly 50 years past due and I was honored to present them to him on behalf of a grateful nation.

My office has helped hundreds of veterans across New Mexico. Whether you or a family member is having trouble filing a claim, receiving benefits, accessing health benefits or military records, replacing medals, or other veterans issues, my office is here to help. Please contact my office by calling (505) 346-6601 or visit the Veterans Resources Center on my website.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator



NEAL WALLACE'S MILITARY DISCHARGE UPGRADE

PHOTO: Meeting with Neal Wallace, October 27, 2018

In 2015, Neal Wallace reached out to me for help upgrading an unjust discharge characterization that he received when he separated from the Army 37 years ago. My office worked with Mr. Wallace to help him gather evidence and submit his application to the Army Board For Correction Of Military Records.

In 2018, the Board determined that the evidence presented by Mr. Wallace was sufficient to grant him full relief. They issued a corrected DD 214 with an upgraded character of service. After receiving his discharge upgrade, Mr. Wallace worked with the Disabled American Veterans who filed a compensation claim with the VA on his behalf. The VA recently determined Neal is service disabled.



THOMAS HARTSOCK'S AIR AMBULANCE BILL

PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich and Thomas Hartsock, March 21, 2019

In December 2017, I was contacted by Gallup Vietnam veteran Thomas Hartsock. About a year earlier, Mr. Hartsock was hospitalized for an Agent Orange related illness. After he was discharged from the hospital, he became very ill and was transported from Gallup to Albuquerque on an Air Ambulance. A few months later, the VA denied payment for the flight, and Mr. Hartsock received a bill for over \$55,000.

I advocated on his behalf, and after 14 months of working with VA offices in three cities, the agency reconsidered and reversed its decision. Mr. Hartsock no longer has to worry about this expense. In March, I had the honor of meeting Mr. Hartsock during a Cibola County veterans' event.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY VETERANS HEALTH INITIATIVE ACT

In November 2018, I introduced the bipartisan Department of Energy Veterans Health Initiative Act to help improve veterans' health care by increasing collaboration among federal agencies and authorizing the Department of Energy's (DOE) national laboratories, including Los Alamos National Laboratory, to develop technologies that solve complex data challenges.

We need to do everything we can to improve health care for our veterans. This is a great example of how our national laboratories can put their high-performing computing capabilities to practical use solving complex, big data challenges. I'm hopeful that by using the national labs' advanced data analytics, this innovative program will identify patterns in the VA's data and help improve outcomes for significant veterans' health care challenges like suicide prevention.

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT

While Social Security benefits are automatically adjusted annually to keep pace with inflation, Congress must pass legislation every year to increase the rates of veteran disability compensation. I was pleased to vote for the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2018, which gave VA disability recipients their biggest pay raise since 2012.

FOREVER GI BILL HOUSING PAYMENT FULFILLMENT ACT

When the VA began implementing the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act last year, problems with the agency's electronic systems left thousands of college students with missed or underpaid housing stipends. I voted to pass the Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act to ensure that students who were affected by these troubles are repaid, in full, the money they are due.

USS VALDEZ REUNION

On September 24, 2018 Sailors from the USS Valdez (FF-1096) gathered in Española for their semiannual reunion. The Sailors kicked off the reunion with a wreath laying ceremony at the grave site of their ship's namesake, Hospitalman Phil Isadore Valdez, who is buried in the Santa Fe National Cemetery. Born in Dixon, New Mexico and a graduate of Española High School, Valdez was mortally wounded in Vietnam on January 29, 1967 while tending to several wounded Marines under heavy sniper fire. Valdez was a recipient of the Navy Cross. This was the first time the Sailors of the USS Valdez have held their reunion in New Mexico.



ALBUQUERQUE FISHER HOUSE GROUNDBREAKING

On November 9, 2018, the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center broke ground on the Albuquerque Fisher House. It is anticipated the Albuquerque Fisher House will be open to veteran families in 2019.

PHOTOS CONT.

EVENTS

PHOTO: USS Valdez Reunion, September 24, 2018



PHOTO: Albuquerque Fisher House Groundbreaking, November 9, 2018



\$3.2 MILLION FOR ANGEL FIRE VETERANS' CEMETERY

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded a **\$3,215,760** grant to fund the establishment and construction of a state veterans' cemetery in Angel Fire.

Currently, the nearest national cemetery to Angel Fire is Santa Fe National Cemetery, which is approximately 91 miles away. The grant will fund the construction of a main entrance, roads, flag assembly area, maintenance building, 100 pre-place crypts, 200 columbarium niches, 100 cremation gravesites, and memorial walls. The project will develop approximately 1.3 acres and serve approximately 15,700 New Mexico veterans and eligible family members.

As a place that already holds great significance for veterans, Angel Fire is the perfect place for a veterans' cemetery. Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park was established in Angel Fire by Victor and Jean Westphall to honor their son, Marine First Lieutenant David Westphall, who was killed in action in 1968. The Peace and Brotherhood Chapel at the State Park, dedicated in 1971, was the first major Vietnam memorial in the entire United States.

I'm proud to welcome this funding to build a veterans' cemetery in Angel Fire to ensure families in northeastern New Mexico can visit their loved ones in a beautiful setting and without the burden of traveling hundreds of miles. I will continue to support additional veterans' cemeteries in our state so that we can honor and respect the sacrifices our veterans from all corners of New Mexico made for our country.

PHOTO: Vietnam Veterans Memorial near Angel Fire, New Mexico

\$1 MILLION FOR VETERANS HOUSING

GRANTS

I'm proud to support local organizations across New Mexico that are at the forefront of efforts to ensure every veteran who has served our nation has a safe and stable place to call home. That's why I was proud to announce that the New Mexico Affordable Housing Charitable Trust recently won a **\$1 million** competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help disabled veterans modify their homes to help them live independently.

In partnership with the New Mexico Mortgage Finance Authority, the Trust will use this funding to rehabilitate or modify an estimated 90 primary residences for eligible veterans statewide. I will continue fighting for resources that connect veterans experiencing homelessness with emergency shelter, lifesaving services, and pathways toward permanent housing.



ALBUQUERQUE VA REGIONAL OFFICE

I recently had the opportunity to meet with Sammie Quillin, Director of the Albuquerque VA Regional Office. Director Quillin and his staff updated me on the VA's implementation of appeals modernization. We also discussed avenues for our offices to collaborate on VA benefits outreach to ensure that New Mexico veterans aren't leaving their hard earned benefits on the table. The Albuquerque VA Regional Office currently provides 32,000 New Mexico veterans and beneficiaries with \$602.4 million in monetary benefits annually.



HOW CAN I HELP YOU?



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich presents Capitol flags to families of fallen service members during the Memorial Day ceremony in Rio Rancho, May 28, 2018

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



COMMEMORATING MEMORIAL DAY 2019

"On Memorial Day, we gather to remember and honor the men and women who sacrificed their lives so that we can enjoy the American freedoms that we all cherish. I am especially proud to recognize New Mexicans' long record of service to our nation.

Over the last year, we have lost some of the last surviving members of the World War II generation, including Navajo Code Talkers and Bataan Death Marchers. We will never forget how their immeasurable contributions led to victory of freedom and liberty over totalitarianism and fascism.

We also remember those who lost their lives in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and our armed forces serving today at New Mexico's military installations and around the world. Additionally, we honor the strength and resilience of our military families—especially those who lost a loved one, and those who continue to care for a veteran.

On this Memorial Day, I join all Americans in honoring our fallen heroes and keeping those serving today at home and abroad in our thoughts and prayers."

- U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich



U.S. SENATOR MARTIN HEINRICH

HEINRICH.SENATE.GOV

505-346-6601

OFFICE LOCATIONS:

ALBUQUERQUE

400 Gold Avenue SW, Ste. 1080
Albuquerque, NM 87102
p: (505) 346-6601
f: (505) 346-6780

FARMINGTON

7450 East Main Street, Ste. A
Farmington, NM 87402
p: (505) 325-5030
f: (505) 325-6035

LAS CRUCES

505 South Main Street, Ste. 148
Las Cruces, NM 88001
p: (575) 523-6561
f: (575) 523-6584

ROSWELL

200 East 4th Street, Ste. 300
Roswell, NM 88201
p: (575) 622-7113
f: (575) 622-3538

SANTA FE

123 East Marcy Street, Ste. 103
Santa Fe, NM 87501
p: (505) 988-6647
f: (505) 992-8435

WASHINGTON D.C.

303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
p: (202) 224-5521
f: (202) 228-2841