



## CONGRESSIONAL UPDATE

FOR NEW MEXICO'S VETERANS





# DEAR FRIEND,

The tradition of New Mexicans answering our nation's call to serve runs deep. New Mexico has long had one of the highest rates of military volunteerism and one of the highest concentrations of veterans in the entire nation. It is extremely important to me that our state's veterans and their families have the support they need and deserve.

One of my most important responsibilities as New Mexico's Senator is to keep America's promise that when our service members return home, they will receive the recognition and full education, housing, and health care benefits that they have earned through their service.

My latest Veterans Newsletter features some recent examples of my work to assist veterans and their families with everything from filing a claim with the VA to applying for the new VA health care benefits for toxic exposure-related conditions under the PACT Act and expediting the process to retrieve military records or replacement medals.

All of us should recognize the brave Americans who put their lives on the line in defense of our great nation. Let's all continue to honor their sacrifices, uplift their families, maintain our support for those who are defending our nation today, and do right by all of our veterans.

Sincerely,



United States Senator

COVER PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich delivers replacement medals to Albuquerque Marine Corps and Vietnam War veteran Antonio Sanchez. November 12, 2023



*PHOTO: U.S. Senator Heinrich presents Vietnam veteran & NM State Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon with a Bronze Star Medal that he earned, but never received, for his service as a combat medic working to save the lives of his fellow soldiers, March 21, 2019.*



# LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## LEGISLATION ON SANTA FE HEADSTONES

Since 1875, the Santa Fe National Cemetery has been the final resting place of veterans and their family members from New Mexico. In 1999, the Cemetery began using flat grave markers instead of the traditional upright grave markers for any veterans laid to rest along the eastern side of the cemetery. This change sparked opposition from veterans and members of the community who believed it diminished the honor and reverence owed to veterans.



PHOTO: Headstones at the Santa Fe National Cemetery.

That's why, in the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), I worked with Senator Ben Ray Luján to pass legislation that repealed the use of flat gravestones at the Santa Fe National Cemetery and helps the cemetery replace the flat markers with upright markers. While flat markers do not lessen the stature of a national cemetery, upright gravestones serve as a more fitting tribute and will provide a uniform look throughout the Cemetery.

I believe that New Mexico's heroes deserve our full respect and honor, including a final resting place with the traditional, upright grave markers that are synonymous with all of our national cemeteries—from Arlington to Santa Fe. I am proud to stand with New Mexico's veterans and military families to restore this tradition for the men and women laid to rest in Santa Fe who answered our nation's call to duty.

# HIGHLY RURAL TRANSPORTATION GRANT

Veterans need to be able to access their hard-earned health care and benefits no matter where they live.

That's why I was proud to secure a \$5 million increase for the Highly Rural Transportation Grants (HRTG) program in the FY24 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Bill.

The increase in funding will directly benefit New Mexico veterans who use this program to access care in Colfax, Union, Mora, Harding, San Miguel, Quay, Guadalupe, Cibola, Socorro, Torrance, Lincoln, De Baca, Catron, Sierra, and Hidalgo Counties through the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services.



*PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich Honors Memory of Korean War Veteran Roy Tachias, June 20, 2023.*



*PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich greets the family of Mr. Antonio Sanchez who earned medals for his military service, but were stolen in the 1980s, November 11, 2023*



# NEWLY INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

I'm proud to cosponsor the following pieces of legislation, which will help to improve the lives of veterans in New Mexico:

## VETERANS HOUSING STABILITY ACT

I co-sponsored the Veterans Housing Stability Act of 2024 after hearing from New Mexico veterans that they were experiencing issues with VA home loan guarantee programs.

The Veterans Housing Stability Act would reinstate a VA home loan program, ensuring that veterans affected by the end of pandemic-era programs no longer face delinquency or foreclosure through no fault of their own.



PHOTO: Bataan Death March commemoration in 2022. Credit: Jim Weber/The Santa Fe New Mexican

## GUARD VA BENEFITS ACT

Our veterans should be able to access their VA benefits without being charged unauthorized and unnecessary fees.

Current law prohibits unaccredited individuals and businesses from charging a fee for assisting a veteran in the preparation, presentation or prosecution of a VA benefit claim. However, the VA and other federal agencies are limited in their ability to enforce the law because criminal penalties were eliminated from the statute nearly 20 years ago.

The Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act would reinstate criminal penalties for these predatory practices, providing the VA with the tools it needs to go after predatory bad actors that seek to swindle veterans out of their hard-earned benefits.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich hosts a medal ceremony for Korean War veteran, U.S. Army Private First Class Alfred Austen, January 5, 2020.

## COMBAT VETERANS PRE-ENROLLMENT ACT

Currently, retiring service members must wait until they have left the military and received their official separation paperwork to apply for Veterans Health Administration health care services.

This can lead to a gap in coverage that can prevent veterans from receiving needed care. The Combat Veterans Pre-Enrollment Act will create an optional program that would allow retiring service members to access VA health care services on their first day as a civilian.



PHOTO: A folded flag with stars shown next to a framed photo of a battleship.



# MILITARY FAMILY NUTRITION ACT



PHOTO: Folded flag and readied for presentation.

Our service members and their families make tremendous sacrifices to defend our freedoms. The last thing they should worry about is whether they or their families have enough to eat. The Military Family Nutrition Act would help more military families keep food on the table by expanding eligibility for federal support.



PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich Honors Memory of Korean War Veteran Roy Tachias, June 20, 2023

# CONSTITUENT SERVICES

## HERSHEY CBOC RIBBON CUTTING

As one of my first actions this Congress, I introduced legislation to rename the VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Gallup as the Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura VA Clinic in honor of the late Medal of Honor recipient and World War II and Korean War veteran Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura, who passed away in 2022. I was thrilled when President Biden signed our legislation into law on October 2, 2023.

A second generation Japanese American, Hershey 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, including his future wife, were detained in American internment camps. He enlisted in the 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 shares a lunch with Korean War Veteran and Medal of Honor recipient Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura at Don Diego's Restaurant in Gallup, June 5, 2015.*

After he received his honorable discharge from the Army, Hershey moved back home to New Mexico and opened up a service station along Route 66 in his hometown of Gallup. He remained active in his community for his entire life, advocating for his fellow veterans and inspiring young people with lectures on patriotism, faith, and service.



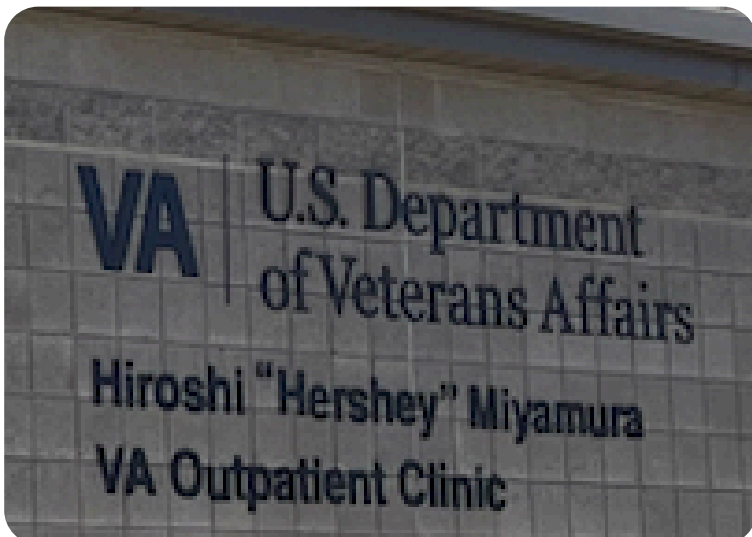
I will never forget the interactions I was so lucky to have with Hershey over the years. I was especially proud to join him and then-U.S. Representative Ben Ray Luján nearly a decade ago to cut the ribbon and open the VA clinic that provides vital health care services to veterans from Gallup and surrounding areas.

I felt it was only fitting to name this CBOC in his honor, and I want to thank the statewide veterans' organizations who wrote support letters to get the legislation through the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.



*PHOTO: The new sign outside the Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura VA Outpatient Clinic in Gallup unveiled*

I hope that honoring Hershey's memory by renaming the VA Clinic in Gallup will inspire future generations of New Mexicans to learn more about his life and the powerful example of humble patriotism that he left behind as his enduring legacy.



*PHOTO: The new sign outside the Hiroshi "Hershey" Miyamura VA Outpatient Clinic in Gallup unveiled*

# RECOGNIZING A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

Earlier this year, at a ceremony at the New Mexico Veterans Memorial in Albuquerque, my office presented former Cochiti Pueblo Governor and U.S. Marine Corps and Vietnam Veteran Dr. Joseph Suina with medals he earned through his service to our nation.



*PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich presented Dr. Joseph Suina with medals he earned in service to our nation. Dr. Suina gives remarks in Albuquerque on March 22, 2024.*

After he enlisted in the Marines, Dr. Suina served two tours of duty in Vietnam in 1964 and 1966. He was wounded in his second tour and earned the Purple Heart Medal, one of our nation's oldest and most distinguished medals, awarded to U.S. service members who have been wounded or killed as the result of enemy action.



*PHOTO: Service medals, including the Purple Heart Medal (top left), that Dr. Joseph Suina earned as a Marine in Vietnam. U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich recently helped to retrieve replacement medals for Dr. Suina after his original medals were stolen, March 22, 2024*



Unfortunately, back in the 1970s, Dr. Suina's service medals were stolen, including the Purple Heart. I was honored to help retrieve these medals that recognize Dr. Suina's incredible bravery and sacrifices.

As I noted in a [speech on the Senate floor](#), Dr. Suina's contributions to our nation extend well beyond his military service. Following his time in the Marines, Dr. Suina served as Governor for his Pueblo and Tribal Councilmember. He led the Cochiti Community Development Corporation and chaired the Cochiti Language Revival Committee.

Dr. Suina also served for many years as a professor at the University of New Mexico's College of Education and as the Director of the Institute for American Indian Education. He has mentored countless teachers whose work continues to make a difference for so many children and improve educational outcomes for Native students in particular.

The legacy of Dr. Suina's service to Cochiti Pueblo, to New Mexico, and to our nation will be felt for generations to come. I am so proud to help bring some overdue recognition to this incredible New Mexican.



PHOTO: Dr. Joseph Suina and his family after receiving his replacement medals in Albuquerque, March 22, 2024.

## RETURNING SERVICE AWARDS

As a young Marine infantryman, Antonio Sanchez of Albuquerque served our country in Vietnam. When he returned home to New Mexico, he placed all of his uniforms, his service medals, and his discharge papers into a duffel bag that was stolen back in the early 1980s.

Mr. Sanchez wanted to retrieve his service awards so he could pass along a concrete reminder of his military service to his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. After hitting a series of dead ends trying to retrieve them on his own, he reached out to my office for help.



*PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich recognizes Marine Corps and Vietnam War veteran Antonio Sanchez of Albuquerque for his service to the country, November 11, 2023.*

Like so many of his fellow Vietnam Veterans, recognition for Mr. Sanchez's service and sacrifice is long overdue.

That's why, on Veterans Day, I was deeply honored to join Mr. Sanchez and his family to recognize the service awards that he earned through his service to our country. I also presented him with an American flag that was flown over the United States Capitol in honor of his service.



# MEDAL RETRIEVAL ASSISTANCE

Military medals are an important way that we honor and recognize the service, accomplishments, and valor of our service members and veterans. Unfortunately, the process to receive these medals can be unnecessarily bureaucratic and delayed. I am committed to helping veterans and their family members navigate and speed up this process.

If you or a veteran in your family needs help navigating or speeding up the process to replace lost or stolen service medals, or retrieve service medals that were earned but never received, I encourage you to please contact me by calling 505-346-6601 or visiting my website to learn more about my office's [Medal Retrieval Assistance program](#).



PHOTO: Dr. Joseph Suina receives his replacement medals after U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich helped replace them, March 22, 2024.

# HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

## MY OFFICE CAN HELP WITH:

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

## TO CONTACT MY OFFICE:

Call (505) 346-6601 or fill out the Privacy Release Form on my website: [Heinrich.Senate.Gov](http://Heinrich.Senate.Gov)

**U.S. SENATOR MARTIN HEINRICH**

**HEINRICH.SENATE.GOV**

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