



In Iowa's Interest:

Recognizing Veterans' Contributions During Military Families Appreciation Month

by Senator Tom Harkin

On November 11th, our country pauses to honor and thank the servicemen and women who have given of themselves to protect and serve our great country. And as we honor their sacrifices, so too do we recognize the contributions of their families, who remain active members of our communities while their loved ones serve in harm's way.

In Iowa, this has special meaning to families of the Second Brigade Combat team. Though most of the brigade returned home this summer, some of their fellow soldiers remain at medical centers across the country. We hope for their speedy recovery and prepare for their return.

In the past year, Congress took an important step toward helping our veterans by unanimously passing a 3.6 percent cost of living adjustment. Starting in 2012, those with service-related disabilities, those who receive survivor benefits and others who have earned benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, will receive their first increase to the cost of living adjustment since 2009.

This year also saw steps taken by Congress to address veterans with special needs and disabilities. For example, I have cosponsored legislation to assure that the VA allow service dogs into hospital facilities. And once the Andrew Connolly Veterans' Housing Act is passed, it will provide specifically adapted housing assistance to individuals residing temporarily in housing owned by family members. I am pleased with the progress we have made with veterans who are disabled, but we still have vast improvements to make to ensure all service members are cared for properly during and after their time in uniform.

I also continue to support efforts to ensure that veterans and their families receive the benefits that they deserve. That is why I am the proud cosponsor of legislation that would repeal the "Widow's Tax" for the survivors of our nation's veterans and another bill that would allow for the full "concurrent receipt" of DOD and VA benefits. This and other legislation will help ensure that the American people fulfill the obligation that we have to those who have given so much to our country.

Finally, I am very pleased that President Obama is fulfilling his campaign promise of pulling all our troops out of Iraq – an overdue step that I have long supported. The Iraqis are now in charge of their own fate and while our brave young men and women have performed with the highest valor, bravery and professionalism in Iraq, it is time for them to come home.

Unfortunately, this year our country lost the last veteran to serve during World War One, the war for which Veterans Day was first commemorated. For him, and for all servicemen and women young and old, we honor all you have done and we thank you.