

## In Iowa's Interest: Protecting Veterans on the Battlefield and at Home

Written by Sen. Tom Harkin  
Tuesday, 29 May 2012 13:52

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*By Senator Tom Harkin*

Honoring veterans this Memorial Day will take on many forms. Some Iowans will attend a parade or local celebration; some may fly an American flag in their yard or lay a wreath in remembrance of the fallen. Each is a symbolic effort to 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 my mind, honoring those who volunteer to wear our nation's uniform is something we can do throughout the year to ensure that the door is open for our returning service members to continue to serve their country. The successful reintegration of our returning heroes is critically important to rebuilding America's middle class, one of the great challenges of our time.

To that end, my office is working to ensure veterans have access to education benefits, health care, and other services to ensure they are successful both on and off the battlefield.

**Protecting Military Education Benefits** – As a veteran and recipient of the original GI Bill benefits, I understand how critical this assistance is for returning veterans' success. For that reason, I am working to protect these benefits against low-quality for-profit colleges that overpromise, overcharge, and under-deliver to our veterans, using slick marketing campaigns to recruit them in order to profit off their education benefits. In fact, data collected by the Senate HELP Committee shows that these benefits may be aiding some schools that otherwise would struggle to meet federal rules.

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Legislation I have introduced will ensure that taxpayers' investment in federal assistance for college students is used to educate and support students, rather than being wasted on advertising, marketing, and recruitment. The Protecting Financial Aid for Students and Taxpayers Act will maximize federal student aid by prohibiting the use of Pell Grants, federal student loans, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, and other federal education funds for such practices, similar to a current law that bans the use of federal higher education dollars for lobbying. In addition, I have worked on a bipartisan basis on legislation aimed at providing every veteran who receives educational assistance from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with the counseling services needed to make informed decisions about their education.

**Tele-town halls** – My staff is now conducting tele-town halls regularly with Iowa veterans to hear firsthand about what returning veterans are experiencing in their day-to-day activities. In everything from concerns with federal agencies, to identifying support at local Vet Centers, to providing staff contacts in Iowa and Washington, D.C.; my office can be of assistance. In fact, we have heard from a number of returning veterans who were not aware of the health care access at these centers, including mental health assistance. To participate in one of the town halls or to learn more, please visit [harkin.senate.gov](http://harkin.senate.gov) or call any of my offices.

**Obtaining medals** – I continue to hear from veterans about service medals that have not been awarded. My office has helped countless veterans and their families obtain medals. Please contact any of my offices to inquire about this service. My staff is happy to assist any constituent to receive the recognition they have rightly earned.

**A PDF version of the column is available by clicking [here](#).**