

## **Veterans**

### **Survivor Benefits**

I am hopeful that 2006 will be the year when the SBP-DIC offset and paid-up SBP are finally made right in the law. The markup of the Senate Armed Services Committee's FY 2007 defense spending bill included my SBP-DIC offset repeal and paid-up SBP language, increasing its chance of passage in the full Senate.

The main fight continues to be in the House of Representatives, where the corresponding bills (HR 808 and HR 968) are both still awaiting a vote in the House Armed Services Committee. Up to 55,000 military widows stand to benefit from this legislation if it is accepted by the House in the Conference Committee this year. It was defeated in the Conference Committee last year by House members based on cost, but I have already successfully added funds to the budget this year specifically for this purpose.

### **Blocking TRICARE Fee Increases**

I was able to protect language in the defense spending bill that would block proposed TRICARE fee increases. The Defense Department has proposed increases to the TRICARE copays as a cost-saving measure for military retirees under age 65. This is an unacceptable breach of faith with America's professional military men and women. I am committed to seeking ways to maintain the access to services and benefits that this important group of Americans has earned.

### **Disabled Vets Tax Fairness**

I am cosponsoring [S. 2503](#), the Disabled Veterans Tax Fairness Act, that would protect disabled veterans from being unfairly taxed on disability benefits due to delays in claims processing. VA disability claims not resolved in a timely manner can be awarded retroactively, but veterans must file amended tax returns within three years to receive the proper tax treatment of these benefits. Unfortunately, sometimes benefit claims are delayed longer than the three-year limit, effectively eliminating the appropriate tax treatment on these benefits for disabled veterans. S. 2503 will remedy this unjust situation by allowing military retirees to claim tax refunds for all the years their disability claims were pending. I have also sent a letter to the Veterans' Affairs Committee asking for an increase in funding to support accurate and timely claims processing.

### **The Dignity for Military Funerals Act of 2006**

I was a cosponsor of the bipartisan Dignity for Military Funerals Act of 2006 ([S. 2452](#)). The bill's companion measure in the House passed the Senate by unanimous consent, and was signed into law on Memorial Day. The law will protect military families nationwide from protesters who disrupt the funerals of fallen American service members.

### **The Call Home Act of 2006**

I am cosponsoring the bipartisan Call Home Act of 2006 ([S. 2653](#)) that would direct the Federal Communications Commission to reduce telephone rates for Armed Forces personnel deployed overseas. The bill would update a law passed in 1992 by extending savings to troops in more countries, and would require the FCC to investigate methods of reducing rates and encouraging carriers to adopt flexible billing procedures for service members and their families. The bill is supported by several groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Military Officers Association of America, the American Legion, the Naval Reserve Association, and the Naval Enlisted Reserve Association.

### **A Salute from Gold Star Wives**

Gold Star Wives are the surviving spouses of members of the Armed Forces whose deaths are connected to their military service. Just before Memorial Day, this group presented me with an award for the work my staff and I have done on behalf of military survivors. I am honored by their recognition and will not cease in the fight to make sure America does right by its veterans.