



## Senator Feinstein Pays Tribute to America's Veterans

- *Calls on Congress to secure increased benefits package* -  
November 10, 2005

**Washington, DC** – *U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) made the following floor statement today commemorating the sacrifices made by all who have served in the Armed Forces:*

“Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to the Veterans of our Armed Services. As combat operations continue in Iraq and Afghanistan, Veterans Day provides an important opportunity to honor those men and women who have made such great sacrifices for our nation, both young and old.

Veterans Day is a time to reflect upon and celebrate the extraordinary contributions of all those who have served our country in uniform.

Veterans Day originated on November 11, 1918 as Armistice Day, commemorating the end of World War I. Although Veterans Day originally marked the end of a conflict, it now is an important reminder that our responsibility to Veterans extends far beyond the close of hostilities.

First, I believe it is important that we pause and pay tribute to the approximately 160,000 troops still fighting in the regions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Sadly more than 2,000 soldiers have paid the ultimate sacrifice. Numerous others have experienced serious injury and harm.

With thousands and thousands of Veterans coming home from this war, we must prepare for their return and ensure that they receive the care and benefits they deserve.

Today, there are 24.5 million living Veterans in the United States. And I am proud that California is home to the most Veterans in the country - over 2.3 million.

As California's Senior Senator, I am honored to serve as the Ranking Member of the Military Construction and Veteran Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee.

In July of this year, the Senate approved a spending package that provides over \$70.7 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs, over \$1 billion more than the Administration's request.

The appropriated funds contain \$23.3 billion for medical services, including nearly \$2 billion dollars in emergency funding to address the fiscal year 2006 shortfall.

The Senate and House are currently in conference to reconcile differences between the two Chambers' respective bills. It is my hope that we will finish conference on a final version of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill and send it to the President for his signature over the next several days.

In addition to medical services and research, the Senate bill also allocates \$104 million for Extended Care Facilities for our Veterans. With 9.5 million Veterans over the age of 65, the need for properly funded long-term care is more important than ever.

To date, a quarter of a million Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom have been discharged from active-duty.

Of these, 49,000 have sought care from the Veterans Administration. As a nation we must fully meet our responsibilities to the Veterans of this country.

Advances in medicine have thankfully spared many Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan from death, but roadside explosives and other weapons have left many of our troops maimed and disabled. To better serve wounded veterans, the Senate recently allocated \$412 million for medical and prosthetics research.

There should not be any doubt that these brave men and women have given their all to protect freedom and our way of life.

It is estimated that 500,000 Veterans spent all or part of this past year homeless. But tragically, the VA only has the capabilities to assist one-fifth of all homeless veterans.

We must continue to push for the development of an effective and expansive therapeutic housing program to help these thousands of Veterans.

The new funding will bring us closer to guaranteeing the health, safety, and comfort of all Veterans. The San Diego VA Medical Center alone will be able to provide care for 2,000 additional patients.

It is also our responsibility to ensure that prescription drugs are affordable. We must also ensure that health care is accessible and that Veteran's Hospitals are provided with the proper tools and support they need.

This is why I have consistently voted for increased funding for VA health care. Just this year I supported an amendment to the Defense Appropriations Act, which extends military health care benefits beyond retirement.

Noble sacrifices of past generations deserve to be remembered and cherished. Congress has consistently supported the construction of new cemeteries where the memories of our esteemed Veterans' can be honored and their legacies celebrated.

As a nation I believe we should also resist attempts to sell out land and facilities earmarked for Veterans to commercial interests.

In West Los Angeles, pressure is increasing on the VA to develop some of the last open space left in the Los Angeles Basin. Land donated to honor the service of Veterans should be kept in the hands of Veterans. We cannot allow our responsibility to former service members to be subordinated to economic interests.

To truly honor Veterans our country needs to preserve the memory of their courage. I worked with my colleagues from Iowa and California to make the battleship *U.S.S. Iowa* a permanent floating museum. The legendary ship's service in World War II and the Korean War will serve as a proper tribute to the Veterans who served aboard this great fighting ship.

I look forward to continuing to work in service of our nation's Veterans. I hope you all will think of these courageous patriots beyond this special day and honor our Veterans and the sacrifices they made in order for us to remain a free, self-governing people.

To our veterans I extend a heartfelt thank you for your service to our country. May God bless each of you and your families."

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