



# United States Senator Daniel K. Akaka

*Chairman, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee*

## More Must Be Done to Keep Our Promise to America's Veterans

Mahalo nui loa for taking the time to read my newsletter on veterans affairs. I am pleased to share with you the work we have been doing for veterans in Hawaii and across this Nation. As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am working with my colleagues on the Committee to ensure that veterans are honored with the benefits and care they have earned through their service. This has been a crucial task as veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan with complicated injuries, testing a health care and benefits system that still has more work to do for veterans of previous wars.

Our work on the Senate Committee is far from done, but as you will see, we are making progress. Rest assured that we will continue, **never forgetting** the price paid by veterans to secure the freedoms we all enjoy.

Congress has been focused on increasing the Department of Veterans Affairs budget. In early March, the majority members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee provided budget views and estimates to the Senate Budget Committee. We recommended



*Washington, D.C., January 11, 2007—Senator Larry Craig (R-ID) hands Senator Akaka the gavel as he takes on the Chairmanship of the Senate's Veterans' Affairs Committee.*

\$4.7 billion over VA's current budget. As the budget process progressed, this recommendation laid the groundwork for VA's budget for the coming year, with both the Senate and House appropriations bills containing the proposed increases. This unprecedented increase for VA comes at a time when it is most needed.



*Lihue, Kauai, January 2006—Last year, hundreds of Hawaii's veterans turned out for Senate field hearings across the state.*

The Senate and House bills give priority to specific VA programs and initiatives by providing significant increases in areas such as traumatic brain injury (TBI) and mental health care — both areas that the Committee is working to improve.

At the end of June, we took action on five bills that will enhance benefits and services for veterans both young and old, with an emphasis on returning servicemembers.

Below are brief summaries of what the bills include:

- Full veterans status and enhanced benefits for Filipino World War II veterans.
- An increase to the annual veterans' service-connected compensation cost-of-living benefits by a cost-of-living adjustment to ensure that inflation does not erode the purchasing power of veterans and their families who depend upon this income to meet their daily needs.
- Improvements to VA's efforts in the treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration of veterans with TBI, often called the signature wound of the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Expand access to VA health care for combat veterans by extending the period of eligibility for recently released or discharged combat veterans from two to five years, to ensure that they have sufficient time to identify and deal with physical and psychological wounds, often called "invisible wounds."
- A requirement that VA provide a servicemember with a mental health evaluation within 30 days of a request.
- The repeal of a 2003 VA regulation which barred middle-income and upper-income veterans from enrolling in the



*Mosul, Iraq, March 2004—The Senate added \$3.5 billion to President Bush's Fiscal Year 2008 budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs.*

VA health care system so as to reopen the system to these veterans.

- Improvements in access to VA health care for rural veterans.
- Expansion and enhancement of services for homeless veterans.
- An increase in the reimbursement rate for travel to VA health care facilities.
- Expansion of VA's insurance programs by expanding eligibility for retroactive benefits under VA's Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) Program and providing a more modern option for life insurance for service-disabled veterans.

I am looking forward to full Senate support of these measures. Our servicemembers deserve the best care and services possible, and these bills are a step in the right direction.

## Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to Hold Field Hearings in Hawaii

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs has scheduled field hearings in Hawaii in August. I hope you will be able to attend these important meetings where we will discuss a number of topics including veteran benefits and health care. As Chairman of the Committee, I will be chairing each of these hearings myself. Please join us.

### VA Care and Benefits in Hawaii

Tuesday, August 21, 2007, 10:00 a.m.

Oahu Veterans Center,

1298 Kukula Street, Honolulu, Hawaii

### VA Health Care on Maui

Thursday, August 23, 2007, 10:30 a.m.

Kalana O Maui Building, Maui County Council Chambers,  
8th Floor, Wailuku, Hawaii

### Access to VA Health Care and Benefits and Outreach to the Guard and Reserve

Monday, August 27, 2007, 1:00 p.m.

Keauhou Bay Sheraton, Keauhou II Room,  
78-128 Ehukai Street, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

Because testimony in Congressional hearings is limited to scheduled witnesses, I have arranged several informal meetings where anyone in attendance can make their views known. I look forward to hearing your ideas and suggestions on how we can better serve our nation's veterans.

### Lanai

Wednesday, August 22, 2007, 10:00 a.m.

Lanai High & Elementary School Cafeteria

### Molokai

Friday, August 24, 2007, 2:00 p.m.

Kaunakakai School Cafeteria

### Big Island

Tuesday, August 28, 2007, 10:00 a.m.

Aupuni Center Conference Room, 101 Pauahi Street

### Kauai

Thursday, August 30, 2007, 4:00 p.m.

Kauai Veterans Center

## Effort to Provide Benefits for Filipino World War II Veterans Advances

On June 27, 2007, a modified version of S. 57 was included in the Chairman's Mark of S. 1315 and was reported favorably



Washington, D.C., June 27, 2007—The Veterans' Affairs Committee favorably reports a modified version of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 as part of S. 1315, the Disabled Veterans Insurance Improvement Act of 2007.

by the Committee. The bill would provide the Filipino veterans with veteran's status and, with the exception of certain benefits provided to surviving spouses and non-service connected veterans residing outside of the United States, would provide these veterans with access to the full range of and benefits provided to United States veterans.

On January 4, 2007, Hawaii Senator Daniel K. Inouye introduced S. 57, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007. I was an original co-sponsor of this legislation, which seeks to provide full U.S. veteran status to all Filipinos who fought alongside Americans during World War II.

S. 57 was referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and on April 11, 2007, I chaired the Committee's hearing on the Filipino Veterans Equity Act. The Committee heard testimony from The Honorable Willy C. Gaa, Philippine Ambassador to the United States, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and representatives from a number of Filipino veterans' advocacy organizations. We also heard testimony from a panel of World War II Filipino veterans, which included Mr. Art Caleda, President of the World War II Filipino Veterans and Auxiliary of Hawaii. Senator Inouye also attended and spoke at the hearing.

## Nisei MIS Vets Honored in New Book

With foresight that proved to be a significant factor in America's victory in World War II, the U.S. Army established a Japanese language school a few months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and recruited second-generation Americans of Japanese ancestry, or Nisei, who would become interpreters and translators in the Military Intelligence Service (MIS).



Washington, D.C., June 27, 2007—Filipino American veterans celebrate the advance of legislation providing veteran's status to all Filipinos who fought alongside Americans during World War II.

Their ability to infiltrate the psyche of our enemy through their knowledge of Japanese culture and language is credited with bringing the war in the Pacific to a quicker conclusion and later, helping turn bitter foes into strong allies.

In 1994, I was among a number of members of Congress, including my colleague and fellow World War II veteran, the senior Senator from Hawaii, Dan Inouye, who asked the Secretary of the Army to publish an official history of the Military Intelligence Service.

In March, I was privileged to co-host an event marking the publication of *Nisei Linguists, Japanese Americans in the Military Intelligence Service During World War II*, by Dr. James McNaughton, Command Historian, U.S. European Command. Among those in attendance were Dr. McNaughton and a number of World War II Nisei veterans, including those who served in the MIS.

*Nisei Linguists* chronicles the history of the Japanese in America, the events leading to the war, the creation of the MIS, and the Nisei involvement in the war. For the soldiers of the Military Intelligence Service, and their brothers in the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, their service was much more than an obligation to the land of their birth, it was an opportunity to prove themselves as loyal American citizens.

As many friends, neighbors, and relatives were transported to concentration camps in various locations around the United States, Nisei soldiers enlisted and served with great distinction. According to Chief of Military History Dr. Jeffrey Clarke, *Nisei Linguists* also reminds us that "the entire experience provides valuable lessons to U.S. Army officers both present and future. In fact, the Global War on Terrorism underlines the need for similar capabilities and programs as the Army girds itself for the sustained struggle ahead."

## Senior Vets on Fixed Incomes May Be Eligible for Benefits

Most veterans and their survivors know VA pays money to veterans disabled by their service. Few veterans and fewer surviving dependents know that VA can also help elderly low-income wartime veterans and survivors pay for medical care.

Wartime veterans age 65 and older may qualify for pension benefits. VA disability pension benefits are paid to veterans of any age with non-service-connected disabilities. To qualify the veteran or survivor's assets must be limited to about \$80,000. Bank accounts are counted. A home and one motor vehicle are not counted.

The annual income limit for single veterans is \$10,929. Higher benefits are paid to veterans who are housebound or require daily help. Higher benefits are also paid to veterans with dependents. Veterans who are married and are in a nursing home or who are so disabled as to need help with everyday activities like bathing and dressing may receive up to \$18,243 a year. Income limits are lower for surviving spouses and adult disabled children.

About 700 Hawaii veterans receive VA pension benefits. Many World War II and Korean War veterans could qualify because their income after they pay for medical care is below the limit. Annual medical expenses above \$546 are subtracted from a single veteran's income. If the veteran is married, medical expenses exceeding \$715 are subtracted. A veteran or survivor, whose income is below the pension amount after medical expenses are subtracted, may qualify for a monthly cash pension benefit.

Deductible expenses include almost anything that a veteran or family member pays for health care. Medicare Part B premiums, Medigap or other health insurance premiums, costs of



Washington, D.C., March 7, 2007—The Jewish War Veterans of the USA honored Senator Akaka with their JYW Medal of Merit for his work on behalf of veterans.

prescription and some non-prescription drugs, nursing home costs, and in some cases, the cost of care provided in the home or assisted living center may be deducted. Medical expenses are subtracted from income even if the veteran pays them from savings.

If you think that you might qualify for a VA pension, contact the VA Regional Office and request an application. Many veterans' service organizations can help veterans get VA benefits.

## Neighbor Island Veterans Get Monthly Benefit and Claims Counseling

The VA regional office in Honolulu has agreed to provide face-to-face benefits information and claims assistance for neighbor island veterans and their families in monthly field visits to Maui, Kauai, and the Big Island, and quarterly visits to Molokai. VA took this action as a result of my request to VA Under Secretary for Benefits Daniel L. Cooper, expressing concern that neighbor island visits had been curtailed. I asked for an explanation, and encouraged Under Secretary Cooper to reinstate the visits.

I encourage veterans to make appointments for assistance during the monthly, or quarterly, VA visit to their islands.

VA has released the following schedule:

- Hilo: first Wednesday (969-3833); Hilo Vet Center, 126 Puuhonu Way.
- Maui: second Thursday (242-8557); Maui Vet Center, 35 Lunalilo Street, Suite 101.
- Kauai: third Wednesday (246-1163); 3-3367 Kuhio Highway, Suite 101.
- Kona: fourth Wednesday (329-0574); 73-4976 Kamanu Street, Suite 207.
- Molokai: (553-8387). Quarterly.

## Help for Veterans Now Available Online

"Turbo TAP (Transition Assistance Program)" is an online resource for veterans, service members, reservists, guard members, and their families, that was launched by the Department of Defense at the beginning of June. It offers a wide variety of links to information about available benefits, healthcare, family relocations, career building, and job searches, designed for transitioning service members. It is intended to appeal to the newest generation of veterans who are more comfortable with emerging technologies and familiar with the internet, and to provide easy, convenient access to all veterans. Check it out at [www.turbotap.org](http://www.turbotap.org)

Dear Friend:

Leading the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs is just one of my duties in the 110th Congress. I am also a member of five Senate committees and Chairman of three Senate subcommittees. For updates on my work in Congress, please visit my website at <http://akaka.senate.gov> where you can also subscribe to my e-Newsletter or send me an e-mail on any topic of interest to you.

I also welcome regular mail, although Senate security delays delivery of letters by up to a month. Whatever method you choose, I look forward to hearing from you.

*Janny*

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## Clinic Updates

### MAUI

VA's outpatient clinic on Maui was without a physician since October of last year. Secretary Nicholson and I worked to add a doctor to the Maui clinic and I am happy to say that Dr. Chen is finally on board and seeing patients at the clinic.

I continue to work toward the possibility of adding an additional doctor – possibly a doctor in the community who would be on contract to VA, as the Maui clinic continues to be overburdened.

### LANAI

In March, VA announced that the Department will be opening an outpatient health care clinic on Lanai. The new clinic will provide consistent service that the veterans can depend on. Once the new clinic is operational, VA will pay for specialty and inpatient care needed by veterans at the Lanai Community Hospital.

