

HEROES Plan

Honoring and Ensuring Respect for Our Extraordinary Servicemembers

The Bush Administration has failed to keep the promise we make to each and every member of the Armed Services when they sign up. These failures can be seen in the lack of force protection equipment for our troops, the troubling conditions wounded troops are facing at Walter Reed, and the series of breakdowns in the Veterans Health Care system.

Senate Democrats are committed to fixing the problems our troops are facing by establishing a system that meets the needs of our troops and finds comprehensive solutions for our heroes, from the battlefield to the local VA and everywhere in between.

Our troops and veterans face six major crises when they leave the battlefield.

- **Failure to Plan** – The Bush Administration repeatedly fails to plan for the returning wounded and refuses to fully disclose about numbers, needs.
- **Walter Reed Syndrome** – The crown jewel of our troop health care system has buildings in need of repair and service members there and around the country face a confusing process to get care.
- **New Injuries, No Answers** – Traumatic Brain Injuries are the signature wounds of this war, but too frequently the DoD medical system and the VA are unable to diagnose and treat them.
- **Mental Health Catastrophe** – Thousands of service men and women come home with PTSD, but access to care is too frequently a challenge.
- **Transition Breakdown** – Injured troops already face terrible challenges, but with the system of moving them from DoD to VA care allows many veterans to fall through the cracks without the care and support they need.
- **Guard & Reserve Over Extended** – Multiple deployments have pushed our National Guard and Reserve to their limits.

Senate Democrats to Address the Real Cost of War to Our Troops – The HEROES Plan

The Senate Democratic plan to Honor and Ensure Respect for Our Extraordinary Servicemembers is a comprehensive series of steps that will unite various committees in a joint effort to stop plugging holes after they develop and to start proactively addressing the problems in the entire system.

The Bush Administration has known about some of these issues for years, but failed to act until news organizations exposed them or massive funding shortfalls came to light.

It's time for Congress to start taking coordinated, aggressive action our troops and their families deserve.

1. Oversight and Investigative Hearings, Including Joint Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing

Multiple Senate Committees have already scheduled oversight hearings to specifically address the conditions and confusing process our returning troops face at Walter Reed. The Senate Armed Services Committee and the Defense Appropriations Committee will receive testimony this week from senior leaders of the Army and the Department of Defense.

In addition, the Senate Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs committees will hold an unprecedented, joint hearing examining the gap between DoD and VA's response to returning servicemembers.

As part of this process, Congress will demand transparency from the Administration and real estimates of the cost of the war to our troops. This will include real estimates of the numbers of troops seeking care in the VA system, the types of injuries affecting our troops and amount of money needed to run the health care system our troops deserve.

2. Ensure President Bush Addresses Problems Facing Injured Troops and Veterans by Focusing the GWOT Working Group on These Issues

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi will press the next GWOT Working Group discussion of the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to include significant attention on the issues facing our troops when they return home.

The President has given inadequate consideration to the needs of the troops when they return home, from planning the war to budgeting the costs to handling the men and women when they actually return home. Senate Democrats, along with their House counterparts, will ask that he face those costs in a detailed meeting at the White House.

3. Legislative HEROES Plan

Working together through the Committee process, Congress will craft legislative solutions to the many problems facing our troops when they return home, including emergency items to be added to the Supplemental Appropriations bill as needed and larger authorizing bills after committee hearings conclude.