



SENATOR CLAIRE MCCASKILL FIGHTING FOR MISSOURI'S VETERANS



Launched Veterans Customer Satisfaction Program to Improve Veterans' Care.

In 2011, Sen. McCaskill launched a new program aimed at improving veterans' experiences at VA medical centers in Missouri. The program, called the Veterans Customer Satisfaction Program (VCSP), empowers veterans to be 'secret shoppers' so they can provide confidential feedback that will help improve care and customer service at Missouri's VA hospitals. Originally launched in the St. Louis area, the program has since been expanded to Kansas City and Columbia.

Improved Rural Veterans' Access to Health Care by Improving Mileage Reimbursement Rates Paid to Disabled Veterans Traveling for VA Care. Sen. McCaskill cosponsored the Rural Veterans Healthcare Improvement Act of 2009 (S. 658), legislation intended to improve access to health care services for veterans living in rural areas. Many veterans living in rural Missouri were having a tough time paying for the gas they used traveling to and from appointments at one of Missouri's VA hospitals. The bill eased this financial burden by permanently increasing the mileage reimbursement rate for veterans traveling to VA facilities from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile. The bill also increased funding for education, research and grant programs designed to improve the delivery of health care to rural veterans. Key parts of S. 658 were ultimately included in the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (S.1963).

Fighting for Jobs for our Nation's Veterans. As a founding member of the Senate Veterans Jobs Caucus, Sen. McCaskill is determined to boost the number of jobs available to our nation's veterans. In 2011, McCaskill cosponsored the Hiring Heroes Act (S. 951). Major provisions of this legislation became law as part of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, which provides tax credits to incentivize employers to hire veterans, extends education benefits available to Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, and takes steps to help veterans translate their military experience into relevant skills sought by civilian employers.

Passed the Post 9/11 GI Bill to Increase Educational Opportunities for Veterans. In 2008, Sen. McCaskill cosponsored and helped to pass the Post 9/11 GI Bill, one of the most important new benefits passed for veterans in decades. The bill, which was modeled after the Montgomery GI Bill, provides an important financial benefit to those who have served in the military since September 11, 2001, to assist them in pursuing a college degree or vocational training. The bill also gives a unique transfer option for veterans to pass the benefits to family members.

Overhauled Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Programs for Veterans. Sen. McCaskill authored legislation, the SUPPORT for Substance Use Disorders Act (S.

459) that she later offered as an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 1390) to overhaul the alcohol and drug abuse treatment programs available for Wounded Warriors and veterans. Her legislation had the support of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), among other groups. Responding to an increase in drug and alcohol-related arrests among veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, McCaskill's amendment ordered a comprehensive review, report and plan on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of substance abuse disorders in the military and called on the Department of Defense to implement new policies based on any "best practices" that emerge from the study. McCaskill's amendment was a major victory for reforming substance abuse treatment programs in the military and included instructions requiring the Department of Defense to address confidentiality in treatment issues.

Established a Suicide Prevention Program for Reservists and National Guard Members. Sen. McCaskill cosponsored an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act that required the Department of Defense to establish a suicide prevention program for Reservists and National Guard members. Based on the Yellow Ribbon program, McCaskill's amendment sought to provide training in suicide prevention for members of the Guard and Reserve, as well as their families and communities. The amendment also provided for community healing in response to suicide. McCaskill's amendment was eventually passed into law as part of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010.

Improved Veterans' Access to Mental Health Care. In May 2010, Sen. McCaskill introduced the TRICARE Mental Health Care Access Act (S. 3371), legislation intended to improve veterans' access to mental health services. Specifically, the bill sought to expand access to mental health services for military families and retirees by removing an unnecessary legal barrier that prevented licensed mental health counselors from participating in the TRICARE system. An amendment based on S. 3371 was included in the Fiscal Year 2011 National Defense Authorization Act.

Worked to Protect Service Member Education Benefits. Sen. McCaskill has taken a leadership role in protecting service members, veterans and their families from being taken advantage of by unscrupulous educational institutions. In 2012, McCaskill joined with seven other Senators to introduce the Military and Veterans Education Protection Act (S. 2116), legislation to prevent for-profit colleges and universities from unfairly preying on military students and veterans. Also in 2012, McCaskill joined with Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA) to introduce the Military Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2012, legislation that would establish safeguards to ensure that institutions of all types that qualify to receive GI Bill and Tuition Assistance benefits meet historical standards.

Hosted Missouri Veterans Town Hall Tours. In 2007 and again in 2010, Sen. McCaskill conducted a series of veterans town halls across Missouri to meet with constituents and address veterans' specific concerns. Among the communities McCaskill visited with veterans on her tours were St. Louis, St. Clair, Springfield,

Columbia, Smithville, St. Joseph, Joplin, Poplar Bluff, Nevada, Cameron, Kirksville, Hannibal, Kennett, Cape Girardeau, Kansas City and Mexico . At each town hall, McCaskill focused on addressing key issues, including the VA budget, legislation improving the quality of health care and benefits that veterans receive, and educational opportunities.

Won the Resignation of Top Official Responsible for Unacceptable Living Conditions for Wounded Warriors at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center and Won Passage of Legislation to Address Systemic Problems Facing Wounded Warriors. In February 2007, Sen. McCaskill became the first Senator to introduce legislation to address a scandal at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in which wounded warriors were shown to be living in unacceptable conditions, fighting a terrible bureaucracy in accessing their care and benefits, and not receiving the quality of assistance in managing their wounds and medication that they critically needed. The Dignity for Wounded Warriors Act (S. 713), introduced with then Senator Barack Obama (D-IL), became the foundation for major wounded warrior related legislation signed into law as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (H.R. 1585). During her work on the legislation, McCaskill called for and ultimately won the resignation of then Lieutenant General Kevin Kiley, the Army Surgeon General, under whose leadership many of the failures in wounded warrior care took place. Kiley had refused to accept responsibility for the failures.

Helped Secure the Congressional Gold Medal for Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs). In March 2009, Sen. McCaskill co-sponsored legislation led by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) to award Women Air Force Service Pilots of the World War II era, a group that included many Missourians, a Congressional Gold Medal. Sen. McCaskill later joined some of the pilots during their Gold Medal ceremony at the Capitol.

Fighting to Designate the Liberty Memorial in Kansas City as the National World War I Memorial. In April 2009, Sen. McCaskill introduced legislation (S. 526) to recognize the sacrifice made by so many Americans and their families during WWI by leading the effort to win national recognition for the memorial the people of Kansas City erected and maintained to honor WWI veterans. In 2011, McCaskill also joined with several of her colleagues to expand the legislation to include honoring the WWI Memorial located on the National Mall and to establish a Commission to coordinate the celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Great War (S. 253).

Fought to Pass the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act. In 2009, Sen. McCaskill helped pass into law the single highest legislative priority for national veterans organizations, a bill to provide for advanced appropriations for Veterans Health Administration accounts in order to provide greater stability and support to critical veterans care programs.

Sought to Assist Service Members Harmed by Vaccines. In 2009, inspired by Missouri Marine LCpl Josef Lopez, Senator McCaskill sought to extend Traumatic Service Member Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) coverage and benefits to service members who undergo debilitating harm due to an adverse vaccine reaction. Lopez almost lost his life after medical complications associated with receiving the smallpox vaccine, a requirement for his deployment to Iraq. McCaskill continues to fight for passage of the Lance Corporal Josef Lopez Fairness for Servicemembers Harmed by Vaccines Act of 2009 (S. 1467).

Fought to Enable Families of Servicemembers Killed by Negligent Foreign Contractors to Access Justice. In March 2009, Sen. McCaskill introduced the Dominic “Rocky” Baragona Justice for American Heroes Harmed By Foreign Contractors Act. Sen. McCaskill had learned that a Kuwaiti contractor performing work for the U.S. Army in Iraq negligently killed Lieutenant Colonel Dominic “Rocky” Baragona and then refused to answer for his death in a U.S. court. She introduced the legislation and held hearings to seek a change in law that would ensure that a foreign contractor cannot avoid American justice nor wantonly disrespect a fallen hero or his family.

Sought Dignity and Privacy for the Families of America’s Fallen Heroes at Funeral Services. In 2011, a court ruling denied the family of a Marine killed in Iraq the ability to recover damages for the intentional emotional distress inflicted on them when members of an activist group led by Fred Phelps protested the fallen hero’s funeral with signs saying “Thank God for dead soldiers,” among other things. Sen. McCaskill joined a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators in asking the Supreme Court of the United States to overturn this ruling and to protect the right of families to mourn their loved ones at a peaceful and solemn funeral.

Supported Critically Needed Increases in Veterans Funding. Sen. McCaskill has fought for the over 57% increase in funding for veterans programs that has been enacted into law since her arrival in the Senate in 2007. She also was a strong supporter of the effort to fully fund the Independent Budget put forth annually by major Veterans Service Organizations, something accomplished for the first time ever in Fiscal Year 2008.