



# Congressman Ed Case

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Second District, Hawai'i

June 2004



A lone veteran stands watch over the West Hawai'i Veterans Cemetery as Congressman Case speaks at Memorial Day 2004 ceremonies.

## 2004 VETERANS' REPORT

Dear Hawai'i Veteran:

As the Civil War drew to an end, President Abraham Lincoln promised our battle-hardened veterans that our country would "care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan." These words have been foremost in my mind as I have represented our Hawai'i's 120,000 veterans in Congress.

As I reported to you in my December 2003 veterans' newsletter, the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress (2003 – 2004) has been a very difficult one for our nation's veterans, even as our country again asked hundreds of thousands of our servicemembers, including guard and reservists, to answer the call to duty in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Nationally, numerous efforts to limit veterans' health, pension and other benefits continued, and other efforts to correct longstanding injustices were resisted. In Hawai'i, access to healthcare for rural/neighbor island veterans and the condition of our state veterans' cemeteries were ongoing challenges.

Yet, through the active involvement of veterans and their organizations nationwide and your supporters in Congress, many of these developments were rejected and some progress was made on longstanding concerns. And there were moments, such as the dedication last month of the

National World War II Memorial on the Mall here in Washington, D.C., when we truly recognized our debt of gratitude and obligation to the millions who made the ultimate sacrifice and the millions more who served.

For me, the opportunity during my own service in Congress to work with our military and veterans throughout our Hawai‘i and in Congress has been personally gratifying. I have visited virtually all of Hawai‘i’s military facilities and interacted with personnel all through the ranks. I have participated in many activities with Hawai‘i’s veterans, ranging from ceremonies on O‘ahu, Maui and Hawai‘i Island, to meetings with veterans and veterans’ groups on Kaua‘i, Moloka‘i and Lana‘i, to visits to veterans facilities such as the VA’s Hilo PTSD Residential Rehabilitation Program. I also visited Iraq to personally assess our involvement firsthand and spend time with our troops.

This is to report back to you on veterans’ issues both nationally and in Hawai‘i, to keep you informed of my efforts, and to seek your further guidance. I do want you to know that this report is going only to the 4,200 veterans in my Second Congressional District who are currently receiving benefits from the VA because that is the only list of Hawai‘i veterans available to me.



Congressman Case visits with Hawaii’s next generation of veterans to discuss their needs near Kirkuk, Iraq, November 2003.

### **Veterans Budget**

The broadest and most vital challenge facing all veterans has been the effort to limit funding for veterans programs nationally. Last year, the current administration recommended a total veterans’ budget for FY04 (which began October 1, 2003) that did not even keep up with inflation; fortunately, that was reversed by Congress.

For FY05, the administration requested \$29.7 billion in discretionary funding for veterans programs, although VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi stated he had requested \$30.9 billion, and an independent budget released by four veterans organizations—AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States—recommended a budget of \$33.6 billion. Last month, the House of Representatives approved a FY05 Budget Resolution with just \$31.0 billion for veterans; I voted against the resolution for this and other reasons.

The final FY05 numbers are not yet complete, but already another battle over FY06 veterans funding is taking shape. Preliminary administration projections for that fiscal year are \$28.7 billion, a proposed outright cut of billions for veterans’ healthcare and other needs.

## Access to Rural Healthcare for Veterans

Full access to quality healthcare for veterans living in rural areas is one of the most significant veterans' issues not only in my Second District but across our country. Many of our veterans live in areas with no easy or even adequate access to VA health clinics to which they are entitled.

Currently, the VA will reimburse all veterans for travel related to service-related injuries, but it will not reimburse travel for those veterans with less than a 30% disability rating for non-service-related injuries. With the President's budget request for FY05 in this area \$257 million below the amount that the Congressional Budget Office estimates is needed to maintain purchasing power of veterans at the 2004 level, it's clear that Congressional action is needed. To this end, in early March 2004 I cosponsored H.R. 2379, the Rural Veterans Access to Health Care Act, and spoke on the floor in support of the bill; I include a copy of those remarks for your review.

## State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial or interment in a cemetery with one's comrades is a basic right of every veteran. While we have one of the finest and most moving of all national veterans' cemeteries in our National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, it is virtually full. Thus, as with other states, Hawai'i's state government operates state veterans' cemeteries. (In fact, we have more such cemeteries than any other state - eight, all in my Second District - partly because of our unique island geography.)

While our federal government assists in the construction of these cemeteries and contributes a nominal amount toward the cost of each burial or interment, our state governments incur responsibility for repair and maintenance as well as the bulk of burial/interment costs. Unfortunately, due to current budget realities, it has become increasingly difficult for our states to maintain these cemeteries to the same standards as a federal veterans' cemetery. We need look no further than the deplorable condition of our West Hawai'i Veterans Cemetery for evidence.

Last year, I introduced a bill (H.R. 2354) that will substantially increase to \$750 per burial the veterans' burial allowance to our state governments that do not have any more burial plots in their federal cemeteries. I also met personally in my D.C. office earlier this year with Gen. John Nicholson, VA Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, to reinforce the dire needs of some of our state cemeteries such as West Hawai'i and to request enhanced assistance, which I am optimistic will be forthcoming.



Congressman Case commemorates Memorial Day with Michael Yoshio Hirata, 92, a veteran of the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion.

## **CARES Commission**

In May 2004, Secretary Principi released the findings of the Commission of the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES Commission), charged with assessing current issues regarding the age and demographic use of VA facilities as well as the overall quality of care for our veterans. Some of the recommendations of the CARES Commission included closing some VA facilities and realigning others. I am happy to report that the CARES Commission has not recommended any significant decrease in services for Hawai‘i, although, as discussed below, we clearly need the enhancement of some VA services back home.

## **Elimination of Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Penalty**

As President Lincoln said, our obligation to our veterans extends to their families. However, under previous law, surviving spouses who reach the age of 62 had their retirement benefits reduced from 55% of the deceased servicemember’s benefit to 35% of the decreased servicemember’s benefit. This unfair reduction—also known as the “Widow’s Tax”—caused a substantial hardship on the surviving spouse.

I supported several bills which eliminated the penalty, but the current Congressional leadership had refused to bring the bills up for a vote despite widespread support. To counter this action, my colleague, Representative Chet Edwards, filed a “discharge petition” to force the leadership to hold a floor vote; I, along with over 200 of my colleagues, signed the petition. Sensing growing support, the House leadership chose instead to include a provision to eliminate the decrease in benefits in the FY05 Defense Authorization bill. Final action on that bill is still pending, but I’m optimistic that the SBP penalty will be phased out.



Congressman Case addressing veterans’ issues at the Wai‘anae Veterans Day ceremony

## **Disabled Veterans Tax (Concurrent Receipt)**

Under current law, most military retirees who have a disability incurred or aggravated in military services must forfeit their military retirement benefits from the Department of Defense in order to receive compensation for their service-connected disabilities from the Department of Veterans Affairs. This is unfair because the benefits are for two different aspects of service.

Last year, I again joined over 200 of my colleagues on a discharge petition to force an immediate vote on outright elimination of this Disabled Veterans Tax (H.R. 303). The House leadership, sensing the momentum for H.R. 303, included a partial, 10-year phase-out of the tax in the FY04 Defense Authorization Bill, which became law in November 2003. That bill contained language which not only expanded the Purple Hearts Plus program which provides concurrent payments to those who disabilities are due to combat or combat-related activities, but also provided new

benefits to military retirees with at least twenty years of service and disability ratings of 50% or higher.

### **Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC)**

Many veterans have contacted me with complaints about CRSC, in particular the processing time as well as confusion about which entity is responsible for making CRSC decisions. The Department of Defense recently issued new guidance regarding CRSC claims, including updated procedures and criteria under which all members of the Armed Forces may apply for CRSC. I welcome your specific questions if you believe you are entitled to CRSC.

### **Equity for Filipino Veterans**

Our Filipino veterans' community both in Hawai'i and throughout our nation continue to assemble the critical support needed to restore to our Filipino veterans the full benefits unfairly withdrawn by Congress in 1946. Last year, we made some progress when Congress passed and the President signed into law H.R. 2297, which increased VA benefits for U.S. residents Filipino veterans and making the new Philippine Scouts living in the U.S. eligible for burial in VA national cemeteries. The House of Representatives also passed H.R. 2357, which would provide VA nursing home benefits and medical services to Commonwealth Army veterans and New Philippine Scouts residing in the U.S.

However, I continue to work diligently with my colleagues on the U.S.-Philippines Caucus as well as the Military Veterans Caucus to enact H.R. 677, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, which would deem all members of the Philippine Army and Philippine Scouts qualified to receive the full benefits denied them almost sixty years ago. I also introduced H.R. 3587, to give priority in immigration to sons and daughters of Filipino World War II veterans who subsequently became naturalized U.S. citizens.

### **Hawai'i Veterans Survey**

I enclosed a survey of Second District veterans' needs with my December 2003 report, and thank those of you who responded. I subsequently wrote to both Mr. H. David Burge, Director Spark M. Matsunaga VA Medical and Regional Office Center, and Colonel (Ret.) Edward Cruickshank, the new Director of the State of Hawai'i Office of Veterans Services, enclosing and summarizing the results (copy attached.) I will continue working on each of the issues you have identified both on the national level and in Hawai'i.

### **Veterans Casework**

Many of Hawai'i's veterans have individual concerns or needs, ranging from disability benefits to VA loans. My Hawai'i caseworker, Liane Ashikawa, specializes in assisting you with your veterans' concerns; please contact her in my Honolulu office at any of the phone numbers listed on my letterhead or by email at [liane.ashikawa@mail.house.gov](mailto:liane.ashikawa@mail.house.gov).

## Further Input

I very much encourage you to contact me with any thoughts, questions, comments, or concerns on veterans' issues or otherwise. Also, please feel free to contact my legislative assistant for veterans' issues, Christopher Abbott, at either (202) 225 4906, or by e-mail at [christopher.abbott@mail.house.gov](mailto:christopher.abbott@mail.house.gov). As always, please check my website at <http://www.house.gov/case> for more information about all services available to you.

It is an honor to serve you in Congress. Each of you has proudly served your country, and, with your assistance, I will work to ensure that our country fulfills the promise repeated to you by President Lincoln.

With aloha,

**Ed Case**

Ed Case  
United States Congressman  
Hawai'i, Second District



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Kaua'i/Ni'ihau: 245-1951  
Maui: 242-1818  
Lana'i: 565-7199  
Moloka'i: 552-0160

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# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 150

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2004

No. 30

## *House of Representatives*

SPEECH OF  
CONGRESSMAN ED CASE  
OF HAWAI'I  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2004

IN SUPPORT OF RURAL VETERANS ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE ACT OF 2003

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join 52 of my colleagues in support of this vital bill, a bill that will help keep our Nation's promise to its veterans who live in our more isolated, rural areas.

We are all well aware of the commitment we all, as a great country, have made to our veterans. However, the truth is that our ability to deliver on this commitment varies throughout the United States. Most particularly, in rural areas of the country, our veterans simply do not have reasonable access to veterans' clinics.

The veterans of Hawai'i's Second District have this very challenge, but with a unique complication. This is because my district is not contiguous, but composed of seven inhabited islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

There are VA medical facilities on only four of those islands, and it is not possible for those veterans who live on the remaining islands of Moloka'i, Lana'i, or Ni'ihau to drive to a clinic.

The same is true of those living on the remaining islands with clinics; they must travel to Honolulu for more advanced treatment.

Currently, the VA will reimburse all veterans for travel to service-related injuries, but it will not reimburse travel for those veterans with less than 30 percent disability rating for nonservice-related injuries. This would be the case, for example, of a veteran who has a bad back, a service-related injury, who then has to have dental work.

Let me give you a real-life example of one proud veteran, Patrick Esclito, who lives on the Island of Lana'i. Pat requested my help last year; he was afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis and had also suffered a massive heart attack in 2002. His condition required him to travel to the Island of O'ahu for treatment at a cost close to \$300 per roundtrip. His wife traveled with him--another almost \$300--because they were both concerned with his traveling alone. My office assisted him in receiving

approval for treatment instead on the Island of Maui. However, he still must pay for travel by boat from Lana'i to Maui because his ailments are not service-related.

Pat's case is not unique. There are 120,000 veterans living in the State of Hawai'i, and many live in areas with no easy or even adequate access to the VA health clinics to which they are entitled. Throughout my Second District, with the cost of air travel skyrocketing, it costs \$200 or more for a round trip plane ticket between Hawai'i's islands.

This is why, when, last year, I surveyed all veterans in my district who are currently receiving VA benefits, and asked them what was and was not working, their number one issue by far was access to health care. I am sure that this is the case in most rural areas of our country.

This bill will allow all veterans to receive adequate access to health care, regardless of where they live in this great country. Nonetheless, the President's 2005 Veterans' Affairs budget provides \$29.8 billion for appropriated veterans programs, \$257 million below the amount that the Congressional Budget Office estimates is needed to maintain purchasing power at the 2004 level. The picture is even worse after 2005. Taking into account inflation, but not caseload increases, the administration's figures reveal that over the next 5 years, the budget for appropriated programs for veterans is \$13.5 billion below the amount needed to maintain programs and services at the 2004 level. Even the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs has admitted that the funding levels for 2006 through 2009 in

the President's budget may not be realistic. I have no doubt that it will be the rural veterans who will be affected the most.

Contrary to what some critics claim, H.R. 2379 will not harm the Veterans' Affairs (VA) healthcare system. Instead, this bill will enhance access to healthcare for veterans who have earned it, but are having to pay to travel to that care. Furthermore, by contracting locally for health care for enrolled veterans, the rural communities that provide these services will benefit economically. H.R. 2379 is a necessary bill to truly fulfill this country's obligation to all veterans.

Mr. Speaker, as the President has repeatedly declared: "We are currently a country at war." Hundreds upon thousands of this Nation's finest men and women are abroad in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Some 4,500 soldiers from the 25<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division from Schofield Barracks in Hawai'i have deployed to Iraq; another 5,400 soldiers from the 25th will soon be deployed to Afghanistan. Reservists and Guard members from my State, many from my Second District, are also serving on Active Duty.

What kind of message does our country's failure to provide access to healthcare for rural veterans send to the thousands of American men and women in uniform currently risking their lives overseas? Our veterans and our future veterans serving overseas deserve better. If we value all our veterans, we need to give them the respect they deserve by properly funding full and adequate access to healthcare for each and every one.





# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 2003

No. 82

## *House of Representatives*

SPEECH OF  
CONGRESSMAN ED CASE  
OF HAWAII  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 2003

### STATE VETERANS CEMETERY FAIRNESS ACT OF 2003

Mr. Speaker, as our troops come home from Iraq and we look forward to D-Day's 60th anniversary, we all feel a deep and renewed sense of gratitude for our Nation's veterans. And as increasing numbers, like members of my own Hawaii's famed 100th Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team, pass on, we must also remember that one of our basic promises to them is to be buried with their comrades in our great national cemeteries, from Arlington to my own National Cemetery of the Pacific.

But increasing numbers of States, 17 at last count, have no Federal VA cemetery, or else those cemeteries are now full. These States must pick up an increasing burden, which is and should be the Federal Government's, and the reality is that, for these veterans, their final resting places are suffering.

Today I introduced a simple bill to raise the Federal reimbursement for veteran burials in State cemeteries where there is no Federal VA option from \$300 to \$750. This is only fair, and I ask for my colleagues' support.

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LANA'I	565-7199
MOLOKA'I	552-0160

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## CONGRESSMAN ED CASE SECOND DISTRICT, HAWAII

ISLANDS OF HAWAII, MAUI, KAHOLAWE, LANA'I,  
MOLOKA'I, O'AHU (WINDWARD, NORTH SHORE,  
CENTRAL, LEEWARD), KAUAI AND NI'HAU,  
AND NORTHWESTERN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

May 17, 2004

Mr. H. David Burge  
Director  
U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs  
VA Medical Center Honolulu  
459 Patterson Road, E Wing  
Honolulu, Hawaii 'i 96819-1522

Mr. Edward Cruickshank  
Director  
State of Hawaii 'i  
Office of Veterans Services  
459 Patterson Road, E-Wing, Room 1-A103  
Honolulu, Hawaii 'i 96819-1522

Dear Mr. Burge and Mr. Cruickshank:

As you know, there are some 120,000 veterans in Hawaii 'i. Some 60,000 of them are in my Second Congressional District, which encompasses suburban and rural O'ahu and all other islands.

I recently wrote to the approximately 4,000 veterans I represent who are currently receiving benefits from the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA). (The Veterans Benefits Administration makes available to Members of Congress a list of such veterans but not a broader list of all veterans, such that I am able to communicate directly only with those veterans current receiving benefits.) My communication reported on various national and local veterans' issues, and provided a survey for recipients to express their views on Hawaii veterans' issues. A copy of my letter and survey are enclosed.

I enclose for your review a tabulation of survey results from over 200 survey respondents. I interpret these results as follows:

- (a) Second District veterans currently receiving benefits are neither strongly supportive nor strongly critical of overall veterans services in Hawaii.
- (b) Their top concern is VA burial practices and benefits and state veterans cemeteries, followed by VA home loan amounts, VA vocational rehabilitation and employment services, VA medical care, and VA education benefits.
- (c) Neighbor island veterans concerns are higher than those of O'ahu veterans, especially for burial/cemeteries and medical services.

Many of my efforts in Congress on veterans' affairs bear directly on these concerns. I have particularly advocated for increases in the overall VA health care budget, for an increased VA

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Mr. H. David Burge & Mr. Edward Cruickshank

May 17, 2004

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focus on the special challenges facing veterans in our country's non-urban areas, and for increased VA reimbursements to states for veteran burial in state cemeteries.

Given the survey results, I will certainly be continuing these efforts. I do, however, want to ask you for your own guidance on what comments you may have on these results as well as what additional can be done to address them.

Thank you for your continuing efforts on behalf of all of Hawai'i's veterans. I look forward to working with you further to meet our collective obligation to them.

With aloha,

**Ed Case**

ED CASE  
United States Congressman  
Hawai'i, Second District

# 2003 Veteran Survey Responses

## Number of Responses

Big Island - 41      Maui - 13  
 Molokai - 2        Oahu - 76  
 Kauai - 22        Total - 225\*

#	Question	All	Big Island	Kauai	Maui	Molokai	Oahu
11	In the past year I have received medical benefits from the VA.	Y- 21 N-194	Y-5 N-35	Y-1 N-19	Y-2 N-10	Y-1 N-1	Y-8 N-65
12	I can obtain all the medical benefits I need from the VA.	2.9	2.8	2.3	3.3	3.2	3.1
13	I am satisfied with the prescription drug benefit offered by the VA.	2.2	2.2	1.7	2.2	1.5	2.4
14	I am satisfied with the VA prescription drug mail program.	2.1	2.2	1.8	2.1	1.5	2.1
15	I am satisfied with the services provided at the Neighbor Island Community Based Outpatient Clinics.	2.3	2.4	1.7	2.5	2.5	3.0
16	I live on a Neighbor Island and do not mind traveling to O'ahu to obtain specialty care.	2.7	2.9	2.1	3.1	1.5	3.4
17	I do not mind traveling to the mainland to obtain specialty care.	3.0	3.1	2.8	3.2	1.5	3.1
18	I received my VA rating in a timely manner (<6 months).	Y-79 N-95	Y-13 N-19	Y-11 N-9	Y-5 N-7	Y-1 N-1	Y-30 N-30
19	I use my VA education benefit.	Y-108 N-98	Y-16 N-24	Y-12 N-8	Y-4 N-7	-	Y-37 N-35
20	I am satisfied with my education benefit.	2.5	2.6	1.9	2.3	-	2.7
21	I use the VA's vocational rehab and employment services.	Y-39 N-146	Y-6 N-32	Y-8 N-12	Y-2 N-10	-	Y-10 N-50
22	I am satisfied with the VA's vocational rehab and employment services.	3.0	3.5	2.6	2.6	-	3.0
23	I have obtained readjustment counseling from the VA.	Y-47 N-133	Y-13 N-22	Y-6 N-14	Y-3 N-10	-	Y-8 N-49
24	I am satisfied with the VA's readjustment counseling.	2.8	2.8	3.1	1.5	-	2.8
25	I have obtained a VA home loan.	Y-65 N-128	Y-14 N-23	Y-7 N-13	Y-3 N-10	-	Y-22 N-43
26	I am satisfied with the loan amount provided by the program.	3.1	3	3	3.6	-	3.6
27	I believe that existing VA burial benefits will fulfill my needs.	3.3	2.7	3.3	4.5	1.0	3.3
28	I am satisfied with the condition of state veterans' cemeteries in Hawai'i.	3.3	3.6	3.3	3.2	1.0	2.8
29	I believe the federal government is providing an honorable burial to my fellow veterans, including a full honor detail.	2.7	3.1	2.7	3.5	1.0	2.3
30	I am satisfied with the counseling, education, language interpretation, escort services, advocacy, and VA case representation services provided by the state government, local community groups, and veteran groups.	2.8	2.9	2.5	3.3	1.0	2.8

Y = Yes    N = No        1 = Strongly Agree    2 = Agree    3 = Neutral    4 = Disagree    5 = Strongly Disagree

\* Some individuals did not indicate where they live.