

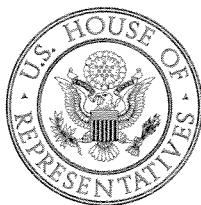
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## CONGRESSMAN ED CASE 2ND DISTRICT, HAWAII

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

**COMMITTEES:**

**BUDGET**

**AGRICULTURE**

LIVESTOCK AND HORTICULTURE  
(RANKING MEMBER)

CONSERVATION, CREDIT,  
RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH

**SMALL BUSINESS**

TAX, FINANCE AND EXPORTS

REGULATORY REFORM  
AND OVERSIGHT

RURAL ENTERPRISES, AGRICULTURE  
AND TECHNOLOGY

November 2005

### 2005 VETERANS REPORT

Dear Hawaii Veteran:

I am proud and humbled to represent you and our Hawaii's almost 120,000 fellow veterans in our United States Congress.

Fully 14% of Hawaii's adult population are veterans, one of the highest percentages in our nation. And fully 5% of all Hawaii citizens 18 to 64 years old are currently serving in our armed forces, the highest percentage in our country. These numbers prove what we all know: that our Hawaii has been, is and will remain deeply committed to contributing to our nation's defense; and that we must all be especially dedicated to meeting our obligations to not only today's veterans, but tomorrow's as well.

In my 2004 Veterans Report last June, I reported that the prior 108<sup>th</sup> Congress (2003-2004) was most difficult for our nation's veterans due to concerted efforts within our federal government to reduce benefits earned by current veterans and to underestimate the needs of future veterans. Unfortunately, that trend has continued in the current 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-2006), where we have seen great resistance to funding especially crucial health needs and to recognizing the special needs of our troops returning from Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In this report, I summarize just some of many national veterans issues my Congressional colleagues and I have pursued to fully meet our country's obligations to you and yours. I also summarize some of my efforts in our Hawaii, where I have been especially fortunate to "talk story" with so many veterans throughout our state. As you well know, here at home veterans needs are often different than on the mainland (for example, the difficulty in getting from island to island for healthcare or of maintaining veterans cemeteries on different islands). In addition, I tell you about my congressional office and how we can and want to help you, whether veterans-related or otherwise.

Finally, especially important for me is a quick survey of your views and needs as one of our Hawaii's veterans. This is invaluable to my continued efforts on your behalf, just as my June 2004 veterans survey proved indispensable, and I appreciate your response.

This mailing was prepared, published and mailed at taxpayer expense.

It is my great privilege to serve you and yours in our Congress. I truly look forward to continuing to work with you on not only the needs of our veterans, but our other efforts toward a better Hawaii, country and world.

With aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Case". The letters are bold and slightly slanted, with a casual, personal feel.

ED CASE  
United States Congressman

### **Selected Veterans Issues in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-2006)**

#### **1. Veterans Budget**

By far the most all-encompassing challenge continuing to face all current and future veterans nationwide is the ongoing effort in Washington, D.C. to limit funding of veterans benefits.

As you know, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers promised benefits to eligible veterans, ranging from disability compensation and pensions to hospital and medical care. VA provides these benefits to veterans through three major operating units: the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA).

VHA is mainly a direct service provider of primary care, specialized care, and related medical and social support services to veterans through an integrated health care system. Veterans are enrolled in priority groups that determine payments for service and non-service connected medical conditions.

It is veterans healthcare generally and VHA specifically where we have seen both the greatest needs for our veterans and the most concentrated efforts to curtail funding. The current administration's budget request for Fiscal Year 2006 (which began on October 1, 2005) would have significantly shortfunded adequate veterans health care in FY06 (as was demonstrated when the VHA ran out of money in June and came to Congress for a \$1.5 billion supplemental appropriation just to get through FY05.)

As a member of the House Budget Committee, I worked with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to craft a FY06 budget that reined in our country's spiraling debt and deficit while adequately funding our nation's highest priorities, including veterans benefits. When the FY06 Budget Resolution, setting the overall framework for the federal government's 2006 fiscal year, failed to do this, I voted against it.

This basic debate continued throughout Congress's consideration of H.R. 2528, making actual appropriations for VHA and other military/veterans programs for FY06, with many national veterans groups joining us in advocating forcefully for adequate veterans funding. In mid-November, Congress approved a final version of this bill which funds VHA at more than what the administration requested but less than what is necessary to keep up with true need.

Obviously, this effort must continue and is, in my mind, the single most important veterans issue facing us all.

## 2. Congressional Consideration of Veterans Issue

Perhaps what has happened in Congress on veterans issues is not surprising given that the basic and time-honored legislative process in this area has eroded. Things didn't get off to a good start in the current 109<sup>th</sup> Congress when the chair of the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs was replaced by House leadership because he was viewed as too sympathetic to veterans needs.

More difficult to understand is the recent announcement by the current committee chair that the decades-old tradition of conducting annual joint hearings of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs committees will be discontinued. These hearings have provided an invaluable forum for Congress collectively to review the legislative priorities of veterans and military service organizations like AMVETS, the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, and to dialogue directly with these invaluable representatives of America's veterans. I joined many of my colleagues in a letter to the House Speaker decrying this decision and urging that it be reversed; at this writing that has not occurred.

## 3. New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century Act

Clearly, in the big picture, we must not only maintain the basic fabric of our prior undertakings to our veterans, but also adjust and update them to today's and tomorrow's needs. The best overall formulation of where we need to go is contained in H.R. 2131, the proposed New GI Bill of Rights for the 21st Century Act, which was introduced by my colleague, Representative Chet Edwards of Texas. I am an original cosponsor of the measure which, to date, has the support of 171 Members of Congress.

H.R. 2131 seeks a wide-ranging update in our basic deal with our veterans. Among its many provisions, H.R. 2131 would 1) mandate adequate funding for veterans' medical care, 2) prohibit until the end of FY2006 medication copayments and imposition of a health care system enrollment fee, 3) extend until 2010 Vietnam veterans' eligibility for readjustment counseling services, 4) collect and process data from pre- and post-deployment health assessments, and conduct preventive post-deployment intervention, 5) seek early detection and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for returning troops, 6) establish a Department of Defense/Department of Veterans Affairs Council on Post-Deployment Mental Health, 7) increase survivors' dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), 8) provide certain pay increases and bonuses for active-duty members, 9) expand benefits under both active-duty and reserve Montgomery GI Bill programs, 10) provide employment assistance for homeless veterans, and 11) expand reserve member eligibility under the TRICARE program. This bill would also repeal the DIC offset from the Survivor Benefit Plan surviving spouse annuities.

#### 4. Concurrent Receipt

Until 2004, federal law required that military retired pay be reduced by the amount of any VA disability compensation received. For many years, some military retirees had sought a change in law to permit receipt of all or some of both, and legislation to allow this has been introduced during the past several Congresses, frequently with cosponsors, including myself, numbering well over half of both the House and the Senate. This is known as “concurrent receipt” because it authorizes the simultaneous receipt of two types of benefits.

The FY2003 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), enacted in 2002, created a benefit known as “combat-related special compensation,” or CRSC. CRSC provides, for certain seriously disabled retirees, a cash benefit financially identical to what concurrent receipt would provide them. The FY2004 NDAA authorized, for the first time, actual concurrent receipt, as well as a greatly expanded CRSC program. The FY2005 NDAA further liberalized the concurrent receipt rules contained in the FY2004 NDAA.

While these initiatives, which I supported, addressed some of this longstanding injustice, I asked the House Committee on Government Reform to evaluate the extent to which Hawaii veterans in my Second District are still affected by the non-concurrent receipt penalty. The Committee reported that over 2,100 veterans in our district—and over 4,500 veterans throughout the state—still lose benefits due to the disabled veterans’ tax.

There have been a number of bills introduced this Congress seeking full concurrent receipt. The one with the greatest support is H.R. 303. This bill would (1) allow immediate concurrent receipt, rather than phasing it in between now and 2014, and (2) repeal the requirement that only military retirees with a 50% disability rating can qualify for concurrent receipt, allowing it for any retiree with a service-connected disability.

I am a cosponsor of this bill. Also, because of current leadership’s refusal to bring this bill to the floor for a vote, I, along with over 200 of my colleagues, have signed a “discharge petition” which would mandate an up-or-down vote of the full House. As it takes a majority of House members (218) to successfully force such a vote under this procedure, we have been working closely with national veterans groups toward achieving this goal.

#### 5. Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)

Our country’s obligation to its veterans extends to your 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 deceased servicemember’s benefit. This unfair reduction—sometimes referred to as the “widow’s tax”—caused a substantial hardship on the surviving spouse.

Prior efforts, in which I joined, to eliminate the penalty were met with resistance. However, last year, sensing growing support, congressional leadership added a provision to the fiscal year 2005 defense authorization bill to phase out the SBP penalty.

Now, however, the issue, like concurrent receipt, is whether surviving spouses receiving survivor benefits should continue to be penalized by not being entitled to receive the

combined total of such benefits and dependent and indemnity compensation (DIC.) I and many other colleagues believe this is also unfair, and so have introduced H.R. 808 to eliminate the military families tax.

## 6. Equity for Filipino Veterans

Our Filipino veterans' communities both in Hawaii and throughout our nation continue to pursue the critical support needed to restore to our Filipino veterans the full benefits unfairly withdrawn by Congress in 1946. During the 108th Congress, we had partial success when Congress passed and the President signed into law H.R. 2297, which I had cosponsored, to increase VA benefits for U.S. Filipino WWII veterans and allow former Philippine Scouts living in the U.S. to be buried in VA cemeteries.

This long-overdue effort must be continued until full justice is provided to our now-elderly Filipino veterans. To this end, I am a cosponsor of H.R. 302, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, to deem certain service performed before July 1, 1946, in the organized military forces of the Philippines and the Philippine Scouts, as active military service for purposes of eligibility for U.S. veterans' benefits, and to repeal certain provisions discounting such service as qualifying service. We don't have much time left to do the right thing here, and we are working toward doing just that.

## 7. Federal Budget

There should be no doubt that, in the big picture, the reason for the pervasive resistance in D.C. to full and fair funding of existing requirements and needs, much less long-denied needs and other initiatives necessary to provide basic fairness to our existing and soon-to-be veterans and to encourage enlistment in our armed forces, is largely the rapid deterioration over the last half-decade in our nation's overall finances. In a nutshell, we have not properly 1) balanced revenues and expenses, resulting in the largest annual deficits and fastest increases in our nation's total debt (now over \$8 trillion, up \$2 trillion just since I began representing you here in 2002) in our nation's history, 2) prioritized spending, and 3) addressed ongoing government inefficiency and waste. Until we correct these all-encompassing deficiencies, too many here will continue, in one form or another, to shortchange our nation's veterans.

## **Selected Hawaii Activities**

### 1. Keeping In Touch

Staying in touch with you and our Hawaii's veterans is essential not only to recognizing your invaluable contributions, but to representing you in Congress and to assisting with Hawaii-specific challenges. I have been fortunate now to join you and speak at many Memorial Day, Veterans Day and other ceremonies throughout our state, in addition to many other events like the groundbreaking for the new Oahu Veterans Center and the annual cleanup at the Kauai Veterans Cemetery. I have also spent time just dropping by veterans centers on Molokai, Maui and Hawaii Island.

My Talk Story community meetings districtwide have been especially invaluable to keeping up on veterans issues, not just nationally but locally. I've done 50 in 2005 throughout Hawaii as well as with Hawaii's own 29<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat Team in Fort Polk, Louisiana and Balad, Iraq. From these Talk Stories I learned, for example, of a crucial challenge facing Maui's veterans, on which we are working, and of the Lanai veterans' request for a U.S. flag flown over our Capitol, which I was able to provide.

My point here is that we can accomplish more together and I can focus on your needs better if and as we stay in touch. I am always willing to try to work into my schedule a meeting with Hawaii's veterans or attendance at an important event, and encourage you to call on me for such needs and opportunities.

## 2. Visiting Our Troops

Today's active military forces are tomorrow's veterans. Especially in this extremely difficult time, when we have hundreds of thousands of our own fighting for us overseas, I believe it is crucial for people like me to spend time with our troops where they are, not only to show our support and solidarity, but to understand and address current and future challenges.

I've done this through visits throughout our Hawaii and overseas. I've now visited our troops in Iraq in 2003 and 2005, and in Afghanistan in 2004. My discussions and observations during those trips have played a major role in my own thinking on our obligations to our current and future veterans, including our guard and reserve component.

## 3. Funding

Many of our veterans issues in Hawaii involve funding of local needs, from cemeteries to centers and other facilities to specific programs. My efforts in this area have been to seek financial assistance from our federal government through existing programs or annual congressional allocations, and to support funding requests from individual veterans and your organizations and federal, state and county government veterans representatives. As we move into the federal government's '06 fiscal year, and look already toward the FY07 congressional appropriations process which starts up in the remainder of this year and early next year, I especially need to hear from you on specific Hawaii needs so I can assist in the best manner available.

## 4. Benefits Workshops

Over my last three years of representing Hawaii veterans, both individually and collectively, it has become increasingly clear that in too many instances our veterans are simply not fully aware of their benefit and other rights and entitlements under law. I discussed this challenge most recently with Dr. James Hastings, the new director of the VA's Pacific Health Care System, and will be working with him and your other veterans agencies to sponsor a series of outreach benefits workshops throughout my district. I am aiming to conduct these workshops in the first quarter of 2006, and welcome your input on how best to do so and how my office may otherwise assist in educating our veterans on the basics of our veterans system.

## Your Congressional Office

### 1. Office Mission and Resources

Overall, my job is to represent the people of my district and our Hawaii in our federal government to the best of my ability. That means being your voice on the great issues of our day, veterans-related and otherwise, listening to your concerns, letting you know what your government is doing, and helping you on your individual problems whenever and however I can.

I have a full-service congressional office in Washington, D.C. and throughout my Hawaii district to assist me in performing my duties. More information on my office and activities and opportunities can be found on my website at [www.house.gov/case](http://www.house.gov/case).

### 2. Contact Information

This is how you can contact me and my office:

#### Washington Office

115 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
Phone: (202) 225-4906  
Fax: (202) 225-4987

#### Hawaii Office

5104 Prince Kuhio Federal Building  
Honolulu, HI 96850  
Phone: (808) 541-1986  
Fax: (808) 538-0233

#### Neighbor Island Toll Free Numbers

Hawaii Island: 935-3756  
Kauai/Niihau: 245-1951  
Maui: 242-1818  
Lanai: 565-7199  
Molokai: 552-0160

e-mail: [ed.case@mail.house.gov](mailto:ed.case@mail.house.gov)

### 3. Your Issues, Thoughts and Concerns

I'd very much like you to contact me with any thoughts, questions, comments or concerns facing you and your community. Also, please feel free to contact any of my staff, particularly my legislative assistant for veterans issues, Christopher Abbott, at either (202) 225-4906, or [Christopher.Abbott@mail.house.gov](mailto:Christopher.Abbott@mail.house.gov), or my caseworker for veterans issues, Liane Ashikawa, through the local Hawaii numbers listed on my letterhead, or at [Liane.Ashikawa@mail.house.gov](mailto:Liane.Ashikawa@mail.house.gov). Furthermore, the contact information for my entire staff and a list of their issue areas can be found at [www.house.gov/case/staff](http://www.house.gov/case/staff).

### 4. Veterans Casework

A vital part of my efforts on behalf of Hawaii veterans is what we refer to as "casework", which means our undertaking to help you with individual issues, especially those involving our federal government. Since so much of veterans benefits (medical, education, housing,

small business, burial, etc.) is federal-related, one of the largest overall part of our casework is helping our veterans with related information or when you run into problems dealing with our federal government. We welcome your contacting us to see how we might be able to assist you with these matters. Please feel free to contact my veterans casework specialist, Liane Ashikawa, directly.

#### 5. Signup for Congressional E-mail Newsletter

I use an e-newsletter to provide frequent updates about what's happening in Washington D.C. as well as the 2nd Congressional District and to ask for input. If you haven't signed up and would like to receive these e-mails, please log onto my website at [www.house.gov/case/email\\_list](http://www.house.gov/case/email_list), or you can call or email at the above contacts to be put on our list. I may occasionally ask you to fill out electronic surveys, but I will never release your contact information to anyone else. If you have already signed up, thank you; you do not need to submit your name again.

#### 6. Other Federal Grants and Resources

There are many opportunities for federal grants and other assistance which are not directly tailored to individual veterans or veterans organizations. You can go to my website for information on such grants and resources and other aspects of our federal government. There, for example, you will find contact information for federal offices in Hawaii, resources compiled by the Congressional Resource Center, and a link to the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance ([www.cfda.gov](http://www.cfda.gov)). This Catalog includes a listing of about 1,500 federal grant and assistance programs and includes a useful search engine.

#### 7. Arranging a Meeting or Event

I truly welcome opportunities to meet personally, discuss issues of mutual concern, address groups on issues of our day, or participate in community events. Please contact Roberta Weatherford in my Honolulu office at (808) 541-1986 or by email at [roberta.weatherford@mail.house.gov](mailto:roberta.weatherford@mail.house.gov).

#### D. This Report Online

For your convenience and use, I have placed a copy of this report online under the newsletter section of my website at [www.house.gov/case/newsletter](http://www.house.gov/case/newsletter).

#### E. Veterans Community Survey

In order to better understand and serve your needs and the overall needs of Hawaii's veterans community, I have attached a short survey. I have included my address on the back of this sheet, so when you are finished, just fold the survey in half, tape it closed and stamp and mail. Or, fax it to my office at 808-538-0233. In the alternative, you can also email your response to me c/o Liane Ashikawa at [liane.ashikawa@mail.house.gov](mailto:liane.ashikawa@mail.house.gov). I greatly appreciate your time and input.





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