



Veterans

Point #1 1.6 million Americans have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, creating the largest influx of veterans since Vietnam.

Point #2 Mental health, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, and suicide are major issues for those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Point #3 Younger veterans are more progressive than older veterans. Barack Obama won a slight majority of veterans under the age of 60 in the 2008 election.

The United States has a sacred trust with its veterans. The men and women in uniform who have served our country deserve our support at home, as well as on the battlefield. More than 2.5 million Americans currently serve in the U.S. military. Approximately 1.6 million have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. This has created the largest influx of veterans into American society since Vietnam.

Wounded Troops Suffer:

The Walter Reed scandal showed that we don't always provide returning service members with the care they deserve.

Veterans Budget Shortfalls:

In 2005, a multi-billion dollar Veterans Administration (VA) funding shortfall required Congress to step in and bail out the system.

Benefits Bureaucracy is Broken:

There are currently more than one million claims pending with the Veterans Benefits Administration. VA error rates have grown to more than 100,000 cases a year.

Shortage of Care for Mental Health:

Veterans are coming home with record levels of combat stress, but we are not adequately providing for them. 38% of those treated by the VA are treated for mental health conditions.

Popular Policy Ideas for Veterans

- **Allow All Veterans Back into the VA:** Reversing the 2003 ban on enrolling modest-income veterans, which has denied care to a million former members of the armed forces.
- **Strengthen VA Care:** Make the VA a leader of national health care reform so that veterans get the best care possible. Improve care for poly-trauma vision impairment, prosthetics, spinal cord injury, aging, and women's health.
- **Combat Homelessness among Our Nation's Veterans:** Establish a national "zero tolerance" policy for veterans falling into homelessness by expanding proven programs and launching innovative services to prevent veterans from falling into homelessness.
- **Fight Veterans Employment Discrimination:** Crack down on employers who commit job discrimination against guardsmen and reservists.
- **Ensure a Seamless Transition:** Demand that the military and the VA coordinate to provide a seamless transition from active duty to civilian life.



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Popular Policy Ideas for Veterans

Fully Fund VA Medical Care: Fully fund the VA so it has all the resources it needs to serve the veterans who need it, when they need it. Establish a world-class VA Planning Division to avoid future budget shortfalls.

Fix the Benefits Bureaucracy: Hire additional claims workers, and improve training and accountability so that VA benefit decisions are rated fairly and consistently; transform the paper benefit claims process to an electronic one to reduce errors and improve timeliness.

Improve Mental Health Treatment: Improve mental health care at every stage of military service. Recruit more health professionals, improve screening, offer more support to families and make PTSD benefits claims fairer.

Improve Care for Traumatic Brain Injury: Establish standards of care for Traumatic Brain Injury, the signature injury of the Iraq war.

Expand Vet Centers: Expand and strengthen vet centers to provide more counseling for vets and their families.



Strategies for Veterans' Outreach

Vet-to-Vet Phone Calls. If you desire to reach out to the veterans' community for whatever reason, and you are not yourself a veteran, try to find veterans who will assist you in your outreach effort. A veteran reaching out to veterans is an incredibly effective method of persuasion.

Establish a Military Advisory Council. For outreach purposes, it is important to build a team of veterans and military family members who meet regularly to provide ideas and feedback while advising on the critical messaging necessary to communicate with the community. Never approach active duty military to be a part of this effort as it can lead to a grey area for those involved. But a Military Advisory Council can provide advocates who can visit Veteran Service Organizations, provide advice, write Letters to the Editor or Op-Eds, or otherwise defend policies you support.

Methods to identify Veterans.

- Some voter files and databases identify whether a given voter has served or is currently serving in the military.
- Certain states like New York provide property tax exemptions that are public records. You can cross reference that list against voter files or databases.





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The New GI Bill

In July of 2008 the Post-9/11 GI Bill was signed into law with large bipartisan support, creating a new education benefits program rivaling the World War II GI Bill. The new Post 9/11 GI Bill will provide education benefits for servicemembers who have served on active duty for 90 or more days since September 10, 2001. These benefits are tiered based on the number of days served on active duty, creating a benefit package that gives current and previously activated National Guard and Reserve members the same benefits as active duty servicemembers.

Although the VA is now accepting applications for the Post-9/11 GI Bill, it will not actually go into effect until **August 1, 2009**. This means that benefits will not be paid for any training or education programs completed before July 31, 2009.

Education benefits included in the New GI Bill:

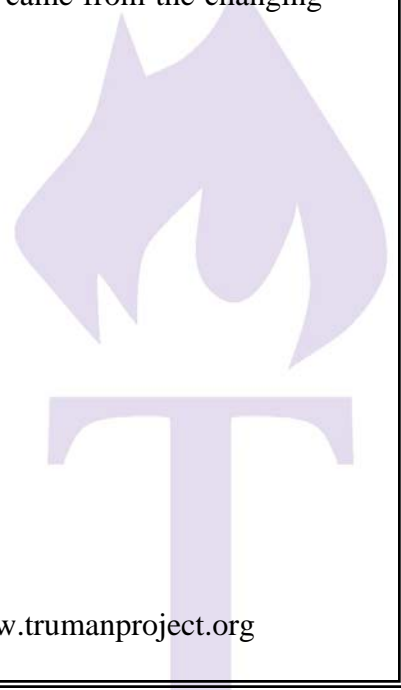
- Up to 100% Tuition and Fee Coverage
- A Monthly Living (Housing) Stipend
- Up to \$1000 a year for Books and Supplies
- A One Time Relocation Allowance
- The Option to Transfer Benefits to Family Members

Veterans' Voting: New Generation Leaning Left

In 2004, George W. Bush won 65% of the veteran vote against John Kerry's 35%. That changed in 2008. Democrat Barack Obama closed the margin in his presidential contest with Republican John McCain, garnering 45% of the veterans' vote compared to McCain's 55%. Most of this shift came from the changing voting patterns of younger veterans.

Young Veterans' Voting in 2008. Younger veterans favored Obama.

- Veterans under 45 went 51% for Obama.
- Veterans between 45 and 59 went 53% for Obama.
- Veterans 60 and older went 61% for McCain.





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Sources

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