

Veterans



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Veterans – Talking Points & Takeaways

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have created the largest pool of American veterans since Vietnam. Nearly two million men and women have served in uniform in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are a unique community, and their issues – such as traumatic brain injury, higher unemployment rates, higher suicide rates – deserve unique attention.

Don't treat veterans as victims! Veterans are not an "interest group," and even those injured prefer to see themselves as warriors, and as those who serve our nation – not as victims. Honor what they have earned as a result of that service, not what they should be given as victims.

This Administration, and Recent Congressional Action, have been of huge help to Vets. President Obama and his allies in Congress have worked together to improve and expand veterans' access to healthcare, and Congress passed a landmark GI Bill opening college to a new generation of veterans. Most Americans aren't aware of this – it's a story that must be told.

Veterans' political affiliations are shifting. Although John McCain won the overall veterans' vote in 2008, the majority of veterans under age 60 voted for Obama. Barack Obama also received six times more campaign contributions from members of the military than John McCain.

Don't Forget About Military Families OR active duty. Most servicemembers and veterans have spouses and children; their concerns need to be heard. Also, while it's important to give special attention to veterans, don't forget about active duty members of the military.

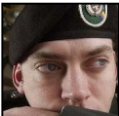
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Veterans – Basic Information



- There are more than 23 million veterans in the United States.
- Nearly 2 million Americans have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan.
- Veterans constitute 10% or more of the population in 44 states.
- In some Congressional districts, 15% or more of the population consists of veterans.
- Political preferences among veterans varies greatly on a generational basis.
- Nearly 40% of all veterans are 65 years of age or older.
- There are five veterans from the Iraq/Afghanistan wars in Congress; 3 Democrats, 2 Republicans.

Veterans – Major Issues



PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury. Hundreds of thousands of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury – higher than at any level in previous history. This is due to the unique nature of these wars, in which the battlefield is everywhere, and huge advances in military medicine have made it possible to save individuals who would have died in previous conflicts. Treatment and diagnosis of these conditions is a major challenge facing today's veterans.



Women Veterans. Women make up more than 10% of active duty military. Due to their service, the VA must adapt traditional programs and create specialized programs to meet unique medical needs. Women's greater exposure to combat in the current wars is also challenging traditional ideas of combat-related evaluations and treatment.

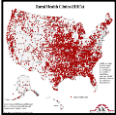


Medical Treatment. Thanks to advances in battlefield medicine, service-members are surviving injuries that previously would have been lethal. This is good news, and it also puts additional pressure on the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide health services to hundreds of thousands of new veterans.

Veterans – Major Issues



Veteran Suicide Rates. The military has seen large increases in the suicide rates of veterans. Data released by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shows the suicide rate went up 26% from 2005 to 2007. The VA is working to identify and prevent the causes of suicide, and veterans who have received VA healthcare are less likely to commit suicide, according to the same data.



Rural Healthcare Facilities. One of the greatest challenges facing veterans who live in rural areas is gaining access to sparsely located healthcare facilities. Expanding access remains a top priority and challenge for the Department of Veterans Affairs.



The New GI Bill. In 2008, Congress passed the "Post-9/11 GI Bill," designed to provide funding to Iraq/Afghanistan veterans to pursue higher education. The Department of Veterans Affairs has processed hundreds of thousands of tuition claims. Despite major problems delivering these new benefits during the first semester of implementation, VA largely resolved those issues by spring 2010.

Veterans – Major Issues



Veteran Homelessness. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 107,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. Over the course of a year, about twice that many experience homelessness.



Veteran Unemployment. In 2009, the unemployment rate for young Iraq and Afghanistan veterans hit 10.2%. By March 2010, that number had risen to 14.7%-- compared to a national unemployment rate of 9.7%.



New Technology. The Department of Veterans Affairs has put a premium on implementing new information technologies that can speed up the processing of veterans' claims for items such as health services and education benefits.

Veterans – Recent Legislative Accomplishments

New Healthcare Law – Does Not Affect Veterans' benefits. New healthcare legislation does NOT undermine or change the VA responsibility to provide healthcare to veterans. Veterans will continue to receive the benefits they expect.

Greater Funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Thanks to recent legislation, the VA's healthcare budget has grown by 60% since 2007 – overall, a \$23 billion increase. Congress also "forward funded" the VA, which creates advanced funding plans that take the politics out of veterans health budgeting and help budget ahead of time.

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act. Passed in 2009, this legislation provides a wide array of benefits and services for America's veterans. It provides greater access to mental health counseling; provides a financial stipend to a veteran's designated caregiver (such as a spouse); provides health care to newborn infants of women veterans; provides training for mental healthcare providers who care for veterans with sexual trauma; increased VA healthcare eligibility to five years; extended counseling to families of veterans.

The New GI Bill. In 2008, Congress passed the "Post-9/11 GI Bill," designed to provide funding to Iraq/Afghanistan veterans, to pursue higher education. More than 475,000 veterans have been certified as eligible to use this new program, while more than 200,000 veteran students are currently enrolled in campuses across the US.

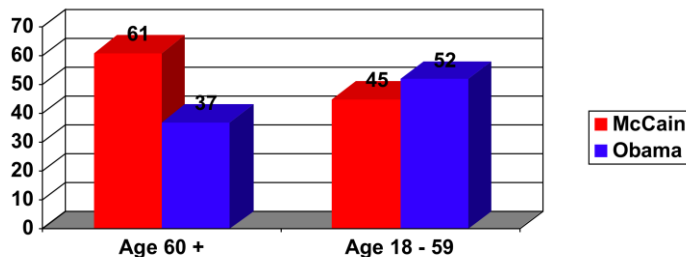


Veterans Political Affiliations Are Shifting

Although John McCain won the overall veterans' vote in 2008, the majority of veterans under age 60 voted for Obama.

Barack Obama also received six times more campaign contributions from members of the military than John McCain.

Barack Obama won a much greater share of the veterans' vote in 2008 (45%) than John Kerry won in 2004 (35%).



Veterans Outreach

Veterans and Military Families make up a substantial percentage of this nation and can have a major impact when the community is properly engaged. Americans have a “Sacred Trust” with our veterans, and should not consider them a “bloc” of voters or supporters. However, many share common values and beliefs and deserve outreach from their political leaders to understand their unique sacrifices and needs.



Veterans and military communities worked hard to design a model for Veteran and Military Family Outreach that made a tremendous impact in 2008. If you or your organization is interested in organizing veterans in your community, some of the most successful programs include:

- **Veteran Advisory Councils or Military Advisory Councils**
- **Vet-to-Vet Call Program**
- **Veteran and Military Family Policy/Pledge**

Veteran/Military Advisory Councils



Who to Include. To gain a full picture and outreach across this diverse community, include both veterans and military families; vets from multiple branches; service in reserves and national guard; different generations, ethnicities, and genders.

Advocates and Surrogates. Members can provide advice on veterans' issues, speak out in the local media, or lead a visit to a Veterans Service Organization (VSO), which are organizations devoted to various veterans' issues and causes.

A Means of Engagement. Advisory Councils can sponsor roundtable conversations with local veterans, build a monthly call program, and sponsor other activities to create means to connect with veterans and military families.

Veteran/Military Advisory Councils

Who Should Serve On A Military Advisory Council?

Veterans who span generations, from WWII through the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Male and female members

Veterans who served in the Reserve and National Guard.

Multi-racial representation

Veterans from across services (Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard)

NOTE: Active duty military should not be approached to be a part of this effort, as this could be seen as politicizing the military or violating the Uniformed Code of Military Justice.

Military family members of active duty personnel, Reserve & National Guard.

Veterans Outreach – More Information



For more information on engaging in veterans outreach in your community – from building a military advisory council to identifying local veterans to setting up a “vet-to-vet” call program – please see our **2010 Military Outreach Memo**, which you can access on our website:

http://www.trumanproject.org/files/papers/Truman_Military_Outreach_Memo_2010.pdf

You can also contact the Truman Project directly:
info@trumanproject.org
202-216-9723

Veterans – Sources

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