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## Senator Lisa Murkowski on Alaska's Veterans & Retired Military

### *Summary*

With 75,000 veterans, Alaska is home to more veterans per capita than any other state. Ensuring that the Veterans Administration has adequate resources to serve the needs of the current generation of veterans and those of conflicts past is one of Congress' most important responsibilities.

### *Champion for Veterans*

Lisa Murkowski is a champion for Alaska's veterans, working to **improve VA budgets** as a member of the Military Construction and VA Appropriations Subcommittee, and **holding the VA and TRICARE accountable** for delivering earned benefits where our veterans and military retirees live.

### *Named to "A TEAM"*

Lisa Murkowski is a recognized force on veterans' issues in the Senate. In 2008, she worked across party lines to **endorse the Post-9/11 GI Bill** instead of a less generous alternative advanced by her party. She **fought to make unused GI Bill benefits transferable to family members** and she is one of a handful of Republicans who has signed on to **support the 2010 GI Bill enhancements**. She was a leader in the fight to secure **"advance funding" of VA health care** so the VA never begins a fiscal year without a budget. She is the lead Republican cosponsor of legislation to **help veterans transition to civilian careers** after leaving the service. The Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America Action Fund named Lisa Murkowski to their "A TEAM" for her leadership on issues affecting veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

### *Support for Alaska Territorial Guard Members*

When the Defense Department tried to undo Senator Ted Stevens' legislation granting military **pension credit to those who served in the Alaska Territorial Guard during World War II**, Lisa Murkowski stood up. She went to the Senate floor to decry the Defense Department's action and won national support for her cause. Then she introduced legislation to overturn the decision. Over the repeated objections of the Obama administration, Lisa Murkowski's legislation was included in the **National Defense Authorization Act and the Defense Appropriations Act**. It has been signed into law and pension benefits have been restored.



### ***Expansion of Health Care Available in Alaska***

Lisa Murkowski **supports an expansion of VA health care services in Alaska**. The new Anchorage clinic, the Mat-Su Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and the Juneau clinic are a good start. But Lisa Murkowski **believes the VA needs to do more**. Instead of asking Alaska veterans to travel to Seattle or Portland for care, she believes **the VA should pay for care in Alaska when available from local community providers**. A VA Inspector General Report requested by Lisa Murkowski reports nearly 600 veterans are being asked to travel out of state for care every year. Most of these veterans live in Anchorage, the Mat-Su, Fairbanks and Kenai. That's not acceptable. Lisa Murkowski is leveraging her position on the Senate Appropriations Committee to get more care for Alaska veterans in Alaska.

### ***Aid for Female Veterans***

Recognizing that one size does not fit all, Lisa Murkowski was an **early supporter and key player in enactment of the Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act**, which requires the VA customize its health care services to the needs of women veterans.

### ***Standing Up for TRICARE Retirees***

In 2009, TRICARE announced a new policy making it difficult for retirees who live more than 32 minutes or 100 miles away from a Military Treatment Facility to continue receiving their health care on base. Lisa Murkowski told TRICARE its **"drive time waiver" policy was unfair to Alaska TRICARE beneficiaries**. TRICARE agreed the policy would not be applied in Alaska. Lisa Murkowski is working with TRICARE and TRIWEST to **increase the number of Alaska providers that accept TRICARE**. She has consistently opposed new enrollment fees and increases in co-pay requirements for TRICARE recipients.

### ***Supporting Wounded Warriors & Disabled Veterans***

Lisa Murkowski believes **no Reservist or Guard Member should be discharged from active duty after returning from a combat zone if he or she suffered injuries and is in need of medical care**. She coauthored the **Wounded Warrior Transition Act**, portions of which have been enacted into law, to ensure returning members of the Reserve Component are aware of their right to demand medical care and seek disability retirement from the military. Lisa Murkowski has **championed increases in funding for Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** and won a battle with TRICARE to include Alaska licensed Psychological Associates in their network, increasing behavioral health access for returning service members and military retirees.

Lisa Murkowski has been working with Alaska veterans and the VA Employee's Union to **improve Veterans Benefits Administration service to Alaska's veterans**. She pushed the VA to hire more benefits processors in Anchorage, opposed the farming out of Alaska claims for processing at VA facilities in other states, and continues fighting to bring a permanent Decision Review Officer to Anchorage.

## ***Lisa Murkowski Delivers for Alaska's Veterans and Military Retirees***

- Co-sponsored the Veterans Health Budget Reform and Transparency Act to ensure advance appropriations for VA healthcare to end the chronic underfunding of VA health care (Public Law 111-81, 2009).
- Worked to make the VA Mat-Su Community Based Outpatient Clinic a reality (2008)
- Sponsored the Wounded Warrior Transition Act, which was included in the fiscal year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act. The Act:
  - Ensures members of the Reserve Component who suffer wounds and injuries on the battlefield are not discharged from active duty until their conditions are fully evaluated;
  - Requires members to be paid for their continued service;
  - Maintains continued health care through the military system, and
  - Ensures access to JAG lawyers who can explain their rights to seek disability retirement from the military.
- Expanded the Qualified Veteran Mortgage Bond program to allow veterans of the 1st Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan to be eligible for low-rate home loans. Alaska is one of five states in the country that is eligible to participate in the QVMB program.
- Supported the Women's Veterans Health Care Improvement Act
- Sponsored the post 9-11 GI Bill to update and improve educational benefits for veterans and their families.
- Pushed the VA to expand their pilot program allowing rural veterans to receive care in Community Health Centers and Native health facilities; the VA added access to behavioral healthcare and improved coordination with providers (2009).
- Negotiated provisions in the Higher Education Opportunity Act to:
  - Permit students to receive the maximum Pell Grant if one of their parents died while performing military service in Iraq or Afghanistan;
  - Place a cap on the federal student loan interest rate (6 percent) if the service member is called to active duty;
  - Permit borrowers who have received a VA disability determination to have their student loans forgiven by the U.S. Department of Education without having to meet different requirements.