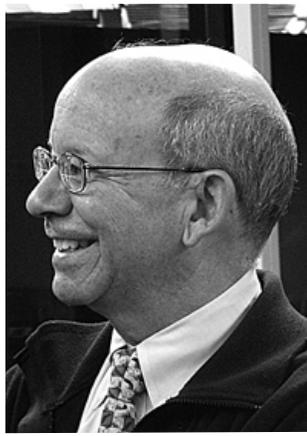


PETER DeFAZIO

VETERAN REPORT



Rep. Peter A. DeFazio
405 East 8th Ave #2030
Eugene, OR 97401



M.C.
Presorted Standard

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE • 4TH DISTRICT • OREGON

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
November 2011

Dear Veteran,

As a nation, we set aside Veterans Day to honor our nation's veterans for their service. We honor all those who have served our nation in the armed forces and in a time of war.

We need to honor the service members, the veterans, and the countless American families who have sacrificed when their loved ones have served. We must recognize and honor them every day. In my office we always strive to do so.

I am proud of the work I have done to improve the levels of care and support veterans receive in our state. Veterans have served bravely for their country; they shouldn't have to fight bureaucracy here at home to get the benefits they have earned.

I will continue my steadfast efforts on your behalf. If you need help with the VA or military to get the benefits you have earned, please contact my office at 1-800-944-9603 for help.

Roseburg VA Medical Center

The future of the Roseburg VA Medical Center (RVAMC) was recently stuck in bureaucratic limbo for a year and a half. While the VA dithered, I worked with Senators Wyden and Merkley, and local veterans groups to prevent damaging cuts to the RVAMC. We questioned the process used by VA consultants Booz Allen Hamilton to make their recommendations, and presented creative solutions for collaboration with Oregon Health & Sciences University (OHSU) and local providers in hopes of preserving and enhancing services.

Thanks to the effort of organized veterans groups and the support of the community, most inpatient services remain intact. The RVAMC will see stable funding levels for medical and surgical care and increased funding for dental, psychological, and substance abuse services. The VA will also invest in capital construction projects including a new surgical room. The RVAMC will now partner with OHSU and rural health care providers to recruit medical specialists, and a stronger partnership with Mercy Medical Center will help meet the critical needs of the VA Roseburg Health Care System.

While this is good news, the VA chose not to restore ICU services at the RVAMC. I fought for the restoration of ICU services, as did local area veterans. Veterans served by the Roseburg VA Healthcare system have earned a hospital that meets their needs. I will continue to do all I can to restore ICU service to Roseburg.

The VA recently chose Carol Bogedain as the new director of the RVAMC. Ms. Bogedain was the top pick of many local veterans and is committed to working with the community to enhance services for veterans in Southwestern Oregon.

I am also working with the VA to enhance services for coastal veterans so they can receive care closer to home. Veterans on the coast rely on a robust VA health care system and should not have to drive several hours just to see a doctor. I will keep pressing the national VA bureaucrats for top-notch health care services throughout the Roseburg VA system for all area veterans.



Rep. DeFazio presents a Bronze Star Medal to Melvin Shaw of Grants Pass.

Recognizing the Service of Veterans

In the last year and a half, I have been honored to present over 30 World War II veterans in my congressional district with the Bronze Star medals they earned during their service. All honorably discharged U.S. Army veterans who received either the Combat Infantry Badge (CIB) or Combat Medic Badge (CMB) during the war are eligible for the Bronze Star medal for meritorious combat service.

The Bronze Star medal for CIB and CMB recipients was established after WWII to recognize the service of U.S. Army infantryman and medics who performed their duties during sustained periods of combat.

Many veterans are eligible for the military honors. Whether it is a

campaign medal earned for service in Korea or a Purple Heart earned in Afghanistan, my staff and I can help veterans and their family members initiate medal requests. We can also help locate the official documents required to prove eligibility. *Please call my Eugene office at 541-465-6732 or 1-800-944-9603 for information and assistance.*

Eugene Veterans Should Have a Functioning Clinic

In the late 1990's, I successfully fought for a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Eugene to serve veterans in and around Lane County. This was the first CBOC built in Oregon. Staff at this CBOC have served veterans well, but our veteran population has outgrown the small facility.

Two years after the federal government approved plans for a new CBOC, the VA has yet to select a site for a new, larger clinic and have delayed the process with highly unusual building, parking, and property requirements for the future location. This is unacceptable to veterans and fails to meet the needs of our growing veteran population.

In June, I asked the Inspector General to review the VA's extraordinarily lengthy contracting process for CBOC. The VA has failed to provide adequate information to verify the contracting process has been handled in a fair and proper manner. Unfortunately, the IG refused to review the process. I will continue to do all I can to pressure the VA to move forward as quickly as possible with an appropriate site that can serve our veteran population.

We also need to upgrade the Eugene CBOC phone system. Currently, most veterans who call the Eugene CBOC have to navigate a cumbersome automated system to reach a VA staff member. My office has heard from hundreds of veterans frustrated because they cannot get assistance from the CBOC using the existing phone system.

My office has repeatedly asked the VA to upgrade the system. The Roseburg VA Medical Center was able to make adjustments based on inefficiencies identified in its phone system. There is no reason that the Eugene CBOC cannot do the same and I will continue to push for it.

A Fair Annual COLA for Veterans

For two years, disabled veterans and social security recipients have not received a cost of living adjustment (COLA). This could not have come at a worse time. Veterans and seniors need a COLA to keep up with rising costs of food, medication, and other basics. Some in Congress have proposed using something called the "chained CPI" to calculate future COLAs. This would be disastrous for veterans, their dependents and seniors. The chained CPI would force them to downgrade their lifestyle as food and medication become more expensive, rather than receive a COLA that covers those increased costs. I staunchly oppose any move to calculate COLAs using the chained CPI. Instead, I have introduced legislation, H.R. 798, which would ensure that veterans and Social Security recipients get a fair COLA based on necessities they actually buy. My bill would make sure that COLAs keep pace with those costs.

GI Bill Expands to Cover National Guard Soldiers and Reservists

In December 2010, Congress passed the Post 9/11 GI Bill Improvement Act that rightfully expanded the Post 9/11 GI Bill eligibility to National Guard and Reserve soldiers who were called upon to serve our country. The bill provided a monthly stipend for veterans who opt to take distance-learning classes. It also eliminated restrictions on institutions providing professional training, apprenticeship programs, certification programs, and on-the-job training.

Unfortunately the bill also included some short-sighted provisions that make the dream of higher education harder to achieve for some veterans. It foolishly eliminated Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) "break pay" during breaks between semesters and over holidays. An individual's mortgage or rental obligation does not disappear over spring break. The elimination of BAH "break pay" is financially burdensome and unfair to the men and women who expected to receive full GI bill benefits by virtue of their military service.

I am working with a bipartisan coalition to overturn this provision and provide certainty to veterans receiving assistance. H.R. 1451 would restore "break pay." I am disappointed that H.R. 1451 was not taken up in the House before the irrational changes to "break pay" took effect in August. You can be sure I will continue to push my colleagues in Congress to restore "break pay."

Frank Van Cleave Retires, Shannon Smyth Continues

As Congressman DeFazio's aide for 13 years, Frank Van Cleave provided unwavering support and advocacy for active duty service members and veterans and their families. As an honorably discharged veteran, Van Cleave focused his professional life on veterans and service members. He worked as a veterans' employment representative with the State of Oregon before joining DeFazio's staff. The Sutherlin native was an invaluable resource for DeFazio's legislative agenda on behalf of veterans, and men and women in uniform.

Shannon Smyth has worked with DeFazio since 2006, responding to the needs of veterans and service members and their dependents. Smyth is also in charge of DeFazio's efforts to help WWII veterans receive the Bronze Star medals they earned in combat. Smyth is an honorably discharged veteran who served in the Air Force, Navy, and Army, and was deployed several times in support of U.S. operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

My offices are here to serve you

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On this Veterans Day, thank you for your service on behalf of myself and all those I represent in Oregon's 4th district. If you have trouble getting the benefits you've earned or other concerns with the federal government, please write to one of these addresses listed on the left or call my office toll-free at 1-800-944-9603.

Sincerely,



Visit My Website At: <http://www.defazio.house.gov>