

Each year on Memorial Day, Americans come together to remember those who have sacrificed their lives on behalf of our country in the name of freedom and democracy. The debt owed to them is immeasurable. Their sacrifices and those of their military families are freedom's foundation. Without the brave efforts of all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen and their families, our country would not live so freely.

On this Memorial Day, we continue to be engaged in hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan, and young men and women will pay the ultimate price while wearing the uniform of our nation. Let us honor the memory of the 4,400 Americans who have died in Iraq and more than 1,000 who have died in Afghanistan. We also honor the sacrifices of our wounded: nearly 32,000 U.S. troops in Iraq and 5,700 in Afghanistan.

As we remember their patriotic sacrifices, we renew our commitment to keep our promises to the nation's 3 million troops and reservists, their families, and 23 million veterans.

**We promise to help them succeed.** With this economic crisis, Congress has enacted critical measures to expand educational opportunity and economic relief. The new Post 9-11 GI Bill, which took effect in August, restores the promise of a full, four-year college education, allowing up to 2 million warriors of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts to be part of a new American economic recovery, just like after World War II. And we have extended those crucial college benefits to all children of fallen service members since September 11, 2001.

Recognizing that veterans coming home are facing double digit unemployment, this Congress has also enacted incentives for businesses to hire unemployed veterans.

**We promise to provide the benefits they have earned and support military families.** Many of our troops have served multiple tours of duty, with great strain on their families and substantial cost to their financial futures. In response, Congress provided special \$500 payments for every month the 185,000 service members and veterans were forced to serve under stop-loss orders since 2001. Congress also has taken steps to reduce the backlog and wait for veterans trying to access their earned benefits.

In addition, we are building more military child care centers and better barracks and military family housing. With over a hundred thousand of service members deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan today, the recognition of the sacrifice that military families make every day has never been more important.

For wounded veterans, Congress just enacted landmark legislation to provide help to family members and other caregivers of disabled, ill or injured veterans, such as training, counseling, and respite care, and to eliminate copayments for catastrophically disabled veterans. Congress also provided family leave benefits for families of our wounded warriors.

**We promise to meet their needs for high-quality health care.** With the strong support of veterans' organizations, this Congress has made an unprecedented commitment to veterans' health care. The veterans' budget, hailed as a "cause for celebration," provides the largest funding increase for health care and other services ever requested by a President – even more than veterans organizations requested.

Through FY 2010, we have increased the investment in veterans' health care and services by 60 percent since January 2007 -- including the largest single increase in the 78-year history of the VA. This funding has strengthened health care for more than 5 million veterans, resulting in 17,000 new doctors and nurses, and greater access for veterans in rural areas. It has been critical for the 382,000 veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan in need of care this year -- with expanded mental health screening and treatment -- to treat the signature injuries of the war, PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury. And we enacted a law guaranteeing timely and predictable funding for veterans' health care, a key priority of many veterans' groups and provided advance appropriations of \$48 billion for veterans' medical care for 2011.

For the 1.8 million women who have bravely served, Congress just enacted legislation expanding and improving VA health care services for women veterans, providing care of newborn children of women veterans for the first time in history, and enhancing treatment for PTSD and sexual trauma. These steps and many others were taken to bring a new direction after failures in administration and continuity of care were highlighted by the scandal at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind. This day and every day, let us honor their service with actions that fulfill our commitment to our troops, their families, and our veterans – and that are worthy of our grateful nation.

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