



## Supporting Our Country's Veterans

### **Background**

Our country honors our veterans regularly, particularly on Veterans Day. Many of my family members, friends, and neighbors have served our country in numerous wars and conflicts for generations.

For far too long, U.S. foreign policy has been heavily rooted in going to war and turning our backs on the troops when they come home. Our veterans deserve the best. Here are some significant improvements we can make.

### **Modernize and Expand Services at the VA**

Many veterans do not live close to VA medical centers, especially once you get outside the Chicagoland area. With only two VA locations in IL03 (Oak Lawn and Joliet), many veterans and their families rely on the services at outpatient clinics. Beyond fighting to improve the quality of VA care, I will advocate for increasing services at satellite locations. Furthermore, implementing Medicare for All will allow our veterans to see any doctor they wish. Quality of care and convenience should be priorities, not whether a certain provider is in or out of the VA's network.

### **Invest in Mental Health Services for All Service Members and Veterans**

Many veterans return from duty experiencing mental health issues. The VA offers mental health services to veterans, however, these services are constrained by doctors in the VA's network.

With limited access to public transportation and travel becoming increasingly difficult for older populations, we need mental health services available in every community--not just at VA locations. I will support measures to increase the VA budget to accommodate more outpatient mental health professionals. Additionally, by implementing Medicare for All, all Americans will be able to see a mental health professional with the only concerns being convenience and preference for providers.

Learn more about how I plan on making life more affordable for all Americans [here](#).

### **Easing the Transition to Civilian Life**

I hear far too often from veterans that adjusting to civilian life is harder than they expected--job searches often too disheartening, higher education and vocational training too expensive, and housing options remaining unaffordable. I will fight to ensure that our veterans' transition to civilian life is as smooth as possible by expanding education benefits for veterans, providing job training programs and employment search resources, and increasing overall funding for VA housing loans.

Moreover, nonprofits like Operation Second Chance, Hire Heroes USA, Mission Critical, and others that advocate for transitioning veterans are already doing great work on creating a smooth transition. We should convene nonprofit leaders with all levels of government to ensure we are treating our veterans well in every policy we create.

Read more about how we plan on addressing unemployment and underemployment in our plan [here](#).

### **End Deportations for Undocumented Servicemembers**

The U.S. government is deporting undocumented servicemembers. This is unconscionable. Undocumented members of the military should have a clear path towards citizenship and should never be deported.

Miguel Perez Jr. served two tours in Afghanistan and was deported at the behest of the Trump administration. He recently got a fair citizenship hearing and is now an American citizen. I will fight to protect the rights of undocumented members of the military like Miguel and to ensure a clear pathway to citizenship for all Americans. They serve our country with honor, and it's our duty to treat them with respect.

Read more about our plan to transform immigration policy [here](#).

### **Equality in the Military**

First, addressing sexual harassment in the military is a major step towards equality in the military. Part of the problem is that often times the offender out-ranks the victim. The military's strict chain of command rules often result in retaliation against the victim for breaking the chain of command, and this results in many victims not reporting offenses at all. [A recent report found 6 in 10 people who experienced sexual harassment in the military were reprimanded for reporting the crime.](#)

I support the creation of a governmental agency to report non-military related crimes to without breaking the chain of command. Senator Gillibrand has a bill on this ([S.1789](#)), and I would co-sponsor this measure if elected to Congress.

Second, we must end the ban on trans servicemembers and allow the VA to cover transition-related surgeries. The only requirements to serve should be a standard of physical fitness and desire to serve. Like other jobs, health care should be offered fully to all people employed by an organization.

Finally, we should open more combat roles to women who want to serve, without lowering standards. I support revising Department of Defense standards so women and men are eligible to serve in the same positions regardless of their gender, but instead based on their merit and rank. This restriction is outdated and can no longer be justified considering the tactics of modern warfare.

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Questions or comments about this policy? Please send us your ideas at [info@marienewmanforcongress.com](mailto:info@marienewmanforcongress.com).