

America has the best fighting force the world has ever known. However, our current engagements overseas place tremendous strain on our soldiers and their families. Frequent and lengthy deployments are the norm for these dedicated soldiers and the families that must bear with their absence. Unfortunately, future threats and obligations will continue to place great demands on our armed forces. To ensure that our military is able to meet these demands, I support growing the military by a number in the 100,000 to 150,000 range. I believe we can achieve this by adding incentives to soldiers' compensation packages. The fact that our current enlistment targets are being met, and in many cases exceeded, and that reenlistment numbers are at near record levels, indicates that this is an achievable task. However, the men and women currently serving in uniform and fighting overseas deserve our full support as they put their lives on the line in the War on Terror. They must not be sent into harm's way without the armor and equipment they need to successfully complete their mission.

Though we have made significant gains in Iraq since President George W. Bush initiated the surge in 2007, and though I believe we have achieved a definable victory there, our gains are still precarious and reversible. We must stay until the job is done, and we can only do so if we provide the funding our troops need. As for Afghanistan, the situation there has been deteriorating for some time, but now is not the time to give up. We know that al Qaeda used Afghanistan as a safe haven from which to plan the devastating attacks of September 11th. We cannot abandon Afghanistan now and let it once again become a safe haven for terrorists.

As a member of the Congressional National Guard and Reserve Components Caucus, I have worked, and will continue to work, to ensure that Iowa's Guard members and Reservists are represented here in Washington. These members of our military have unique skills, and, when combined with the active components of our armed forces, create a synergy that contributes to America's military superiority.

Despite recent increases in the size, funding, and function of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), many veterans still struggle to access the care and benefits to which they are entitled. I have supported numerous pieces of legislation to ensure that veterans are given the care and benefits they have earned and have been promised, and I will continue to work to improve the disability compensation claims process within the VA and ensure that eligible beneficiaries get their claims processed in a way that is timely, accurate, and humane. Sitting idly by as problems persist at the VA and veterans are not able to access their benefits is the same as denying veterans access to care and benefits – something that is always unacceptable, but particularly so while young men and women are serving in harm's way and putting their lives on the line to defend our freedoms and our way of life.

