

UNION VETERANS

AFL-CIO

Veterans Day Message from the Union Veterans Council

Mark Ayers

Chairman - Union Veterans Council

Veterans Day was originally known as "Armistice Day." It was created in 1919 to commemorate the end of World War I. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law a bill that specified that the day of November 11 would thereafter come to be known as "Veterans Day." Ever since, November 11 has become a solemn occasion for all of America to pause and reflect upon the great sacrifices made by the men and women who have served in America's Armed Forces.

The proclamation that accompanied the law that was signed by President Eisenhower included the president's decree that Americans "would solemnly remember the sacrifices of all those who fought so valiantly, on the seas, in the air, and on foreign shores to preserve our heritage of freedom." It also called upon all American citizens to "re-consecrate ourselves to the task of promoting an enduring peace so that their efforts shall not have been in vain."

While we take the time on Veterans Day of 2009 to reflect upon and honor the courage and sacrifice shown by our veterans as they continue the fight to defend liberty and freedom against those that seek our demise, I would urge all Americans, and especially all American policymakers, to similarly take heart of the particular plight of the veteran community during this time of extreme economic hardship in America.

Today, figures from the U.S. Department of Labor show that the unemployment rate among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans stands at 11.3%, which is significantly above the overall rate of 9.8% for the nation as a whole. Approximately 185,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are out of work. Many of these unemployed veterans are National Guard or Reserve troops who were called to duty but found when they came home that their old jobs were no longer there for them.

That is why the Union Veterans Council is calling on the U.S. Congress to quickly enact an extension of Unemployment Insurance benefits coupled with an effort to strengthen and enforce the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) which will ensure protections for veterans claiming their former jobs when they return from active duty.

We are also encouraging all Americans to support our efforts to strengthen and enforce veteran preference rules. Since the time of the Civil War, veterans of the Armed Forces have been given

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some degree of preference in appointments to Federal jobs. Recognizing the sacrifices that are continually being made by those serving in the Armed Forces, Congress has enacted laws to prevent veterans seeking Federal employment from being penalized because of the time spent in military service.

By law, veterans who are disabled or who served on active duty in the Armed Forces during certain specified time periods or in military campaigns are entitled to preference over non-veterans both in hiring from competitive lists of "eligibles" and in retention during reductions in force. These preference rules should be strengthened and enforced to the maximum degree possible.

Further, the Union Veterans Council encourages the expansion of state and local programs for providing job training and employment counseling services. We find ourselves dumbstruck that the U.S. Congress is actually considering cutting the funding for the nationally recognized "Helmets to Hardhats" program that has so successfully placed tens of thousands of transitioning veterans into careers in the construction industry. We are urging Congress not to cut this funding, just as we are urging them to expand coverage of the new post-9/11 GI Bill to include payments for apprenticeships and on-the-job training.

It is time that we - as a nation - renewed our commitment to what President Franklin D. Roosevelt expressed in 1944 when he signed the first GI Bill:

What our servicemen and women want, more than anything else, is the assurance of satisfactory employment upon their return to civil life.

For today's veterans, that same desire holds true.

We must take the proper steps to renew our commitment to those who have made the ultimate commitment to America. And aside from making sure that today's military veterans have the access and wherewithal to receive the medical care their so richly deserve, we must also ensure that they have a smooth and secure pathway to civilian life. And that begins with a job.

Because no matter where or when our veterans have served, they've always served with distinction. And that service was predicated upon courage, dedication and patriotism; which are the foundations for our American way of life.

So on this Veterans Day, we have the privilege of honoring these very special American men and women whose sacrifices and service are beyond most people's comprehension. We owe them a great deal. First and foremost, we owe them our freedom. Secondly, we owe them our gratitude. And finally, we owe them the prospect of a secure and stable life upon the conclusion of their service.

Thank you-and God Bless America.

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Vietnam Veterans Memorial Ceremonies

On Veterans Day, at the invitation of [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund](#) President Jan Scruggs, Union Veterans Council Chairperson and Building and Construction Trades Department President Mark Ayers will speak at the annual ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Earlier in the day, President Ayers and other Union Veterans Council members will participate in a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation breakfast meeting.

Send us your Veterans Day Pictures

Whatever you are doing on Veterans Day, send us your pictures and we'll post the best ones on our website. Email your Veterans Day pictures to: hard91ways@photos.flickr.com

U.S Department of Labor Annual Salute to Veterans

On November 5, the Union Veterans Council representatives were invited to participate in the Annual DOL Salute to Veterans hosted by Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis and Ray Jefferson, Assistant Secretary of Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS). Attending the event were ALPA President Capt. John Prater, Metal Trades Department President Ron Ault, Executive Director of Helmets to Hardhats Darrell Roberts, Dave Kolbe for the Ironworkers, Walter Cahill for IATSE, and Greg Woodhead and Gordon Pavy for the Union Vets Council. Emceeding the event, Ray Jefferson gave a special shout out to the Union Veterans Council, and met with us afterwards. The event included special recognition for the achievements of VETS career employee Earl R. Schultz, and a panel discussion with Secretary Solis and US Army Capt. (Ret.) F. Dawn Halfaker, and Air Force Command Sgt. Maj. Michelle S. Jones on their insights into the relationships between private employers and our returning veterans.

President Obama Launches Major Veterans Employment Initiative

President Obama signed on Nov. 9 a new executive order that underscores to federal agencies the importance of recruiting and training veterans, to increase the employment of veterans within the executive branch, and to help recently hired veterans adjust to civilian life.

The executive order establishes a Veterans Employment Program office within most federal agencies, the White House said. These offices will be responsible for helping veterans identify employment opportunities within federal agencies, providing feedback to veterans about their employment application status, and helping veterans recently employed by agencies adjust to civilian life and a workplace culture often different than military service.

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki. will chair and high-level committee to oversee the program. To read the executive order go to:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-veterans-employment-initiative>

UVC Meets with Progressive Veterans Organizations

On September 29th the Union Veterans Council staff participated in a quarterly meeting of the progressive veterans organizations organized and chaired by the Truman National Security Project. Organizations include IAVA, Veterans for Common Sense, be the Change, Student Veterans of America, VoteVets, Veterans and Military Families for Progress, VetPac, Service Members Legal Defense Network, Blue Star Families and others.

The meeting was at the office of Rep. Pat Murphy, D-PA, an Iraq War veteran, and former instructor at West Point, who spoke to the group about recruiting veterans as candidates (Democrats) to run for office, the current status of the "don't ask don't tell" policy in the military, and details of his recent visit to the troops in Afghanistan.

VA Secretary Vows to Fight Veteran Homelessness, \$3.2 billion to fix problem

<http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1807>

Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki on November 3, unveiled a plan to end veterans' homelessness in five years, saying that without action the improvements of recent years could be lost because of the bad economy. Shinseki said the VA will spend \$3.2 billion next year to reduce homelessness among veterans and is working to strengthen partnerships with other government agencies and service organizations. He said he recognizes that a goal of zero homeless veterans is ambitious but that he wants a high target so that everyone puts in their best efforts. Government officials and homeless experts worry that the number of homeless veterans could climb another 10 to 15 percent in the economic downturn.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advanced Funding Bill signed by President Obama

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On October 22, President Obama signed into law the Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act (H.R. 1016). This critical legislation requires Congress to approve the health care budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at least one year in advance, providing timely, predictable funding for veterans' health care. Advance Funding was a top legislative priority for unions in the Union Veterans Council for 2009. Veterans from all of the country worked for many months to make this happen.

"The Way We Get By" will be aired on PBS's P.O.V. on Veterans Day.

The Way We Get By is a very moving film about the lives of three dedicated individuals in Maine welcoming our young American heroes home as they touch down at Bangor International Airport after tours abroad. Find your local PBS schedule for the show, or watch online at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/waywegetby/>

FREE Meal - Applebee's on Vet's Day

In recognition of your service to our country, all veterans and active duty military personnel are invited to eat free at Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar Restaurants this Veterans Day, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009.

As you may recall, Applebee's launched a pilot program last year on Veterans Day offering free entrees to military service personnel and veterans. Because the response was so overwhelmingly positive, Applebee's is extending the invitation throughout the country this year.

All U.S. veterans and active duty military with proof of current or former military service will eat free at all Applebee's nationwide on Veterans Day, Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2009.

Proof of service includes: U.S. Uniform Services Identification Card, U.S. Uniform Services Retired Identification Card, Current Leave and Earnings Statement, Veterans Organization Card, photograph in uniform or wearing uniform. For additional details, visit:

www.applebees.com/vets

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