



Veterans Report 2012

SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS

Dear Vermont Veteran,

As the last of our soldiers have returned from Iraq, I want to thank the men and women who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan for their service. Like many brave generations before them, they answered their nation's call. We owe a great debt to all our veterans, those who fought in World War II, in Korea, in Vietnam, in the Gulf, in other places, and most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. We must never forget their service to our country.

As you know, I am a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. In that position I am fighting to make certain that veterans from Vermont and across the country get all of the benefits to which they are entitled. Among other recent achievements, we have assured that veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are eligible, immediately after discharge, for enrollment in the VA health care system. But we have not forgotten those who served in the past – providing substantial funding to make sure all veterans get the quality health care they need and deserve.

In Vermont, we are making substantial progress in providing and expanding good quality VA health care to our veterans. At the White River Junction VA Medical Center construction is now underway to build a new Women Veterans' Clinic, a new Imaging Center, a new residential care center, and a new co-generation energy plant.

In the last several years we have seen new Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) open in Brattleboro and Newport, which provide high quality primary care to the veterans in those areas. At the Colchester CBOC, the largest in the state, planning is now taking place to move or expand the facility, which is currently bursting at the seams. The CBOCs in Rutland and Newport are also being moved into newly renovated facilities. The five CBOCs in Vermont enable thousands of veterans to receive their primary health care locally, rather than having to travel to White River Junction.

In terms of education, more than 420,000 veterans, including many in Vermont, are now receiving higher-education benefits through the largest expansion of the GI Bill since World War II. It is equally important that these benefits can be used by veterans' families. If you would like more information about these educational benefits – which not only pay for college tuition, but provide a monthly stipend and other allowances – please contact my office.

Before I conclude, let me say that in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Irene, Vermonters responded with tenacity, courage, and generosity. Nowhere was this more true than with the work of our Vermont National Guard, assisted by Guard units from other states. The Guard helped those left homeless by the floods, rebuilt roads, moved debris, and in every way made sure our state and its residents could recover from the devastation.

My office has several staff members who are always available to assist veterans and their families. If there are any problems you think we can assist you with please call toll-free: 1 (800) 339-9834.

Again, thank you for your service to our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bernie".

Bernie Sanders
United States Senator

Improving and Expanding Health Care for Vermont Veterans

In the last several years, Vermont has made significant progress in improving and expanding health care for our veterans. Working with veterans throughout the state, Bernie, a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, has helped establish two new Community-Based Outreach Clinics (CBOCs) in Brattleboro and Newport. Further, major improvements are taking place in Rutland and Newport as these CBOCs move to their new locations. The Colchester CBOC is the largest in the state and, with a significant increase in their patient-load, is clearly outgrowing its present building. Plans are now underway to either move the Colchester CBOC to a new location or expand its existing facility. The Bennington CBOC moved to a new and expanded location several years ago.

Getting to the VA Medical Center in White River Junction is a long trip for many veterans, especially

in winter. That is why Bernie and others have worked hard to make sure that Vermont veterans have excellent quality primary health care in clinics near where they live. While more work needs to be done, we are making real progress with Vermont's CBOCs.

Any veteran can, of course, still receive treatment at the White River Junction VA Medical Center. And we are making progress there as well. For many years there has been discussion about the need for a Women's Veterans Clinic at White River VA. Well, it is now being built. A new Imaging Center and a new residential care center are also under construction.

In an effort to save money on fuel and cut back on greenhouse gas emissions, the White River VA is also installing a major new wood chip co-generation plant. Not only will this plant cut the fuel bill for the VA, it will also create jobs in the local area.

Bernie recently discussed important veterans issues with the leadership of the Vermont VFW during their visit to Washington.



Helping Our Veterans Afford College: The Post 9/11 GI Bill

The Post 9/11 GI Bill is the nation's largest investment in veterans' education since World War II. The new GI bill pays recent vets an amount that is equal to the full cost of an undergraduate education at the University of Vermont, any of the state colleges, or many of the private colleges. More than 420,000 veterans in Vermont and across the country are now utilizing this benefit.

"Veterans put their lives on the line in defending this country and now,

in the midst of this terrible recession, I am extremely proud that the Post 9/11 GI Bill is enabling them to get a higher education which they otherwise might not have been able to afford." Senator Sanders further called it, "one of the most important pieces of legislation passed since I came to the Senate."

The 9/11 GI Bill also pays for trade and technical school education and the benefit is often transferable to children or spouses.



Bernie Meets with VA Secretary General Eric Shinseki

Bernie has been extremely impressed by the hard and effective work of Vietnam veteran and former Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki as VA Secretary. As VA Secretary, General Shinseki has focused on improving VA health care, ending the disgrace of many of our veterans being homeless and making sure that veterans get the benefits they applied for in a reasonable time. Several years ago, General Shinseki visited Vermont and spoke at the graduation ceremonies at UVM.

Senator Sanders brought the concerns of Vermont's veterans directly to the Secretary during a recent meeting in Bernie's Senate office. Some of the issues discussed were the unexpected cancellation of medical appointments and unnecessary delays in having volunteers certified to help drive veterans to receive medical care.

The senator and Shinseki also addressed the progress the VA is making in moving claims adjudication to a digital system and speeding up the process. "Secretary Shinseki is addressing a number of challenges that have plagued the Department of Veterans Affairs for years," Bernie said. "Clearly, he

is focused on finding effective solutions for the needs of veterans."

Bernie and the Secretary also discussed the need for the VA to do a better job in trying to make sure that the products sold in VA gift shops around the country are, whenever possible, made in the USA.



VA Secretary General Eric Shineski and Bernie Sanders.

Legislation and Veterans

“We’re all in this together. We’ve got to stand with the soldiers not only in combat, but with their kids and their families at home.”

Bernie Sanders



As the largest deployment of Vermont soldiers since World War II has wound down, and with the rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury extremely high, Senator Bernie Sanders secured funding for outreach programs to help returning soldiers make a successful transition back to everyday life.

The Vets Outreach Program of the Vermont National Guard has become a national model. Based on the principle that the most effective support occurs when outreach workers go to returning soldiers, rather than waiting for soldiers to come to them, a trained outreach worker personally visits all returning Vermont soldiers at home to see if they or their family might be in need of help. "These men and women answered the national call to service. We have a responsibility to make their transition home as smooth and seamless as possible," Bernie said. Senator Sanders successfully introduced legislation to provide funds to move the Vermont model to a national scale, and \$16 million was appropriated. Vermont and seven other states received these grants.

Bernie also helped secure substantial funding to ensure that families of deployed Guard members can pay for childcare expenses. "We're all in this together. We've got to stand with the soldiers not only in combat, but with their kids and their families at home." The legislation that Bernie introduced has substantially increased burial and funeral benefits for the families of deceased veterans.

Primary Care – Is There a Clinic Near You?

VA Outpatient Clinic at Bennington

186 North Street
Bennington, VT 05201
Phone: (802) 447-6913

VA Outpatient Clinic at Brattleboro

71 GSP Drive
Brattleboro, VT 05301
Phone: (802) 251-2200

VA Outpatient Clinic at Colchester

162 Hegeman Ave., Unit 100
Colchester, VT 05446
Phone: (802) 655-1356

VA Outpatient Clinic at Newport

189 Prouty Drive
Newport, VT 05855
Phone: (802) 334-4131

VA Outpatient Clinic at Rutland

215 Stratton Road
Rutland, VT 05701
Phone: (802) 770-6713



Lots of Improvements at WRJ

Going Green

White River Junction VA is storing wood chips for a new energy plant that significantly reduces the medical center's dependency on fossil fuel. It produces steam, electricity, and chilled water for the entire medical center – cutting fossil fuel use by 50 percent.

Psychiatric and Rural Residential Care

A large facility at the White River Junction VA includes 14 residential beds and 15 lodger beds to accommodate patients who must stay overnight. "These beds will be especially convenient for patients who travel long distances and need to stay overnight," Bernie said.

Women's Care

The Women's Comprehensive Care Center in WRJ is adding a more comfortable waiting room and four new examination rooms. "More and more women veterans are turning to the White River Junction Medical Center for health care," Bernie said. "I'm delighted with these new facilities."

Helping Our Veterans

Senator Bernie Sanders has a team of constituent advocates ready to help you with any problems you may have with a federal agency or policy. If you think we can help you with a concern; or if you have time and wish to help our veterans, please call us at: 1 (800) 339-9834.



Bernie will send you an email update providing you with a fresh perspective on events as only he can. Go to sandersonsenate.gov to sign up.



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