



TOM LATHAM - TRUSTED LEADERSHIP FOR IOWA

**Report on the 110th Congress  
Veterans-Military Accomplishments of  
Congressman Tom Latham**

Paid for by Latham for Congress

# Veterans-Military

*No one has done more to secure our freedom than the veterans and military personnel. Congressman Latham has consistently fought to ensure that veterans and military personnel receive the benefits they deserve, and will continue to do so in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress.*

**Tom Latham has been endorsed for re-election by the political arm of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW-PAC)**

**Tom Latham earned an “A” on the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Association's (IAVA) scorecard on veterans’ issues for the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress**

For his work on health care issues for the National Guard and Reserve, Congressman Latham has received the following awards:

**The Eagle Award**, Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States.

**The National Legislative Advocacy Award**, Naval Reserve Association.  
**Award of Merit**, The Military Coalition (veterans organizations representing over 5 million veterans and their families).

## **Defense and Veterans Legislation Authored by Congressman Latham –**

**H.R. 558 – The National Guard and Reserve Readiness and Retention Act.** This legislation provides access to military health benefits for members of the National Guard and Reserve.

SUMMARY: Allows all Guard and Reserve members to purchase military health coverage for their families under the TRICARE program on a continuous basis. Previously, TRICARE was provided only while the member was deployed, leaving many families uninsured for most of the member’s time in service. Congressman Latham led efforts in the House to pass this legislation, which culminated in the enactment of H.R. 558 as section 706 of H.R. 5122, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY07, on October 17, 2006. The new benefit became available October 1, 2007.

**H.R. 1428 - The National Guard and Reserve Retirement Modernization Act.** This legislation overhauls the reserve retirement system.

SUMMARY: Drafted in response to input received from members of the Iowa National Guard and other reservists throughout the country, the legislation narrows the gap between active duty and reserve retirement by

allowing Guard and Reserve members to begin receiving retired pay earlier than age 60 if they had spent significant periods of time on deployments. Congressman Latham has led efforts in the House to reform the reserve retirement system. **H.R. 1428 was enacted as section 647 of H.R. 5185, the National Defense Authorization Act for FY08, on January 28, 2008.** Congressman Latham is now working with his colleagues to make the changes retroactive to cover all who served following September 11, 2001, as was included in his original legislation.

**H.R. 1426, the Veterans Access to Local Health Care Options and Resources (VALOR) Act.** This legislation gives Veterans the option of accessing health care from local health care providers rather than travel long distances to VA facilities.

**SUMMARY:** The VALOR Act would allow veterans enrolled in the VA health care system to receive the same VA-funded care at a local hospital or physician's office that they would otherwise be eligible to receive in a VA facility.

**BACKGROUND:** In rural states like Iowa, veterans often have to travel long distances to VA medical facilities to receive the health care promised to them. Congressman Latham spoke with many Iowa veterans who talked about the need to give up a full day, sometimes in fragile condition, to travel for care at VA facilities. Additionally, they told Congressman Latham they sometimes have to wait months for an appointment.

The gap in care for rural veterans is likely to increase dramatically in coming years. Due to increased deployment of National Guard and Reserve units, combat veterans will increasingly be dispersed in rural areas, far from large urban centers or concentrations of veterans where VA facilities tend to be located. The fact remains that not all of America's veterans have equal access to VA services.

Latham's VALOR Act addresses access problems by expanding the existing VA-operated health financing program known as fee-basis care. The VA has specific statutory authority to contract with non-VA facilities for medical care, but current law severely restricts its use. The VALOR Act lifts the restriction thus allowing veterans to receive care at a local hospital or physician's office that they would otherwise be eligible to receive in a VA facility. On April 26, 2007 the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a hearing on Latham's VALOR Act.

Congress took a vital step in this direction when it passed the Rural Veterans Access to Care Act, H.R. 1527, which is cosponsored by Congressman Latham. The bill was passed in the House and Senate, and cleared for the White House on September 30, 2008 as part of a larger veteran's measure, S.

2162. The legislation requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement a three-year pilot program to allow rural veterans in certain regions to receive VA-financed medical care from non-VA medical facilities in their own communities for the first time.

**H.R. 1115 and House Concurrent Resolution 175.** This legislation helps children of fallen service members.

**SUMMARY:** This legislation corrects an unintended consequence of previous law that left children of fallen service members, who were single parents without access to death benefits until reaching the age of 18.

**BACKGROUND:** Congressman Latham led the effort in the House to allow service members to set aside all or part of the death gratuity for the care of their children. A similar provision was enacted as section 645 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY08, on January 28, 2008. Since the provision did not address past deaths, Congressman Latham authored House Concurrent Resolution 175, which was passed in both the House and Senate. The resolution encouraged courts to allow families of fallen service members to access death benefits according to any clear instructions left by the service member, helping at least one Iowa family struggling financially as the result of the legal loophole.

## **Latham Defense and Veterans Initiatives –**

**Veterans' Health Clinic in Decorah, Iowa.** Congressman Latham has led efforts to establish a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic to serve veterans living in Northeastern Iowa. In February 2008 the Congressman wrote the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Director of the VA Midwest Health Care Network to support opening a veteran's clinic in Northeast Iowa. Congressman Latham also inserted language in H.R. 5658, the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Authorization and Lease Act of 2008, in which the House Veterans Affairs Committee instructed the Department of Veterans Affairs to strongly consider opening a veteran's health care clinic in the area.

The VA regional office has since determined that a VA clinic is needed in the Decorah area. **A plan has been approved for opening the clinic in the fall of next year. The plan is now under review by the Veterans Health Administration Central Office in Washington.** The application must go through a formal review process at the Department of Veterans Affairs, with final approval by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. A final decision is expected within 12 months and the earliest possible opening of the clinic, if approved, would be during the fall of 2009.

**Funding for Research on War Injuries.** Over 80% of war injuries suffered in combat involve the extremities. Congressman Latham has led efforts in the House to increase funding for vital research to improve treatment for injuries to the extremities. Congressman Latham authored letters to the leadership of the House Appropriations Committee beginning in February 2008, and convinced many of his colleagues to join him, in demanding a dramatic increase in funding for research on treating war injuries to the extremities suffered by veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. While the program had received \$4.8 million in funding for FY08, the Department of Defense had identified a series of vital peer-reviewed research projects that could go forward immediately if a dramatic funding increase of more than \$100 million were provided. **H.R. 2642, the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008, which was signed into law June 30, 2008, includes \$273.8 million for battle casualty research, including as much as \$50 million for extremity injury research. The FY09 Department of Defense Appropriations bill includes \$61 million for extremity injury research.** Congressman Latham continues to communicate with U.S. Army and congressional leaders to ensure that maximum funding is provided.

**Construction of Iowa National Guard Facilities.** Through his position as a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, Congressman Latham has initiated several efforts to modernize Iowa National Guard facilities. Most recently, following a 5-year effort Congressman Latham secured funding in the FY09 Military Construction Appropriations bill for a much needed addition and remodeling at the 133<sup>rd</sup> Test Squadron in Fort Dodge. In FY06, he secured funding for renovation of Army National Guard vehicle maintenance facilities in Fort Dodge. In FY04, he secured funding for an addition to the Fort Dodge Readiness Center supporting the Headquarters of the 1st Battalion, 194th Field Artillery of the Iowa Army National Guard. In FY03, he secured funding for upgrades at Boone Readiness Center, making it a state of the art armory.

## **Key Defense and Veterans Legislation Supported by Congressman Latham –**

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Care.** Congressman Latham has supported appropriations legislation that has increased funding for VA medical care by over 100% since 2001.

**H.R. 5740 – The Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act. (Latham is an original cosponsor).** This bi-partisan bill completely overhauls and nearly doubles G.I. Bill education benefits for veterans. The bill closely resembles the educational benefits provided to veterans returning from World War II, and increases benefits to address the reality of rising tuition costs and increased deployment of National Guard and Reserve units. **This legislation**

**was signed into law on June 30, 2008 as part of H.R. 2642, the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2008.**

**H.R. 6562- The Agent Orange Equity Act. (Latham is an original cosponsor).** The bill amends federal law to clarify that service in Vietnam includes service in the waters offshore, its inland waterways and the airspace above Vietnam for the purposes of establishing a presumption of exposure to Agent Orange. This provides clarity to obscure language in the Agent Orange Act that has so far allowed the VA to deny disability claims filed by some navy veterans exposed to Agent Orange.

**H.R. 5791 – The National Guard and Reserve Readiness Act. (Latham is an original cosponsor).** Congressman Latham joined Congresswoman Shea-Porter (D-NH) and Senator Clinton (D-NY) in introducing this legislation as the lead Republican sponsor. This legislation provides access to TRICARE military health benefits for reservists up to one year ahead of their deployment date. Current law provides this at 90 days prior to deployment, which the Iowa National Guard has reported is often not enough time to take care of outstanding dental and medical issues that may be present. This can result in delayed deployment, or problems getting medical issues addressed in the field.

**H.R. 1527 - The Rural Veterans Access to Care Act. (Latham is an original cosponsor).** The bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to implement a three-year pilot program to pay for qualified veterans, enrolled in the VA health care system and living in rural areas, to receive VA-financed medical care from non-VA medical facilities in their own communities, similar to the VALOR Act. **H.R. 1527 was included in S. 2162, which passed in the House and Senate, and has been cleared for the White House.**

**H.R. 2417 – GI Bill Second Chance Act. (Latham is a cosponsor).** Allows military personnel who did not initially enroll in education benefits to sign up, during an annual enrollment period, after paying the required enrollment fee. Currently, soldiers must either opt in when joining or be excluded from the program.

**H.R. 3481 – Support for Injured Service Members Act. (Latham is a cosponsor).** Implements the president's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors recommendation to allow up to six months leave for a family member of a service member who has a combat-related injury. This would effectively double FMLA leave for these individuals (current law allows three months).

**H.R. 6185 – the TRICARE Continuity of Coverage for National Guard and Reserve Families Act. (Latham is a cosponsor).** Would allow reserve retirees to purchase TRICARE coverage at government cost before they

would otherwise become eligible for TRICARE coverage upon receiving reserve retirement benefits at age 60.

**H.J.Res. 9 – the Flag Protection Amendment. (Latham is a cosponsor).**

Proposes an amendment to the Constitution of the United States authorizing the Congress to prohibit, by law, the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.

**H.R. 303 – the Retired Pay Restoration Act. (Latham is a cosponsor).**

Allows retired, disabled veterans to receive full military retired pay and veterans disability compensation without offsets (currently, only veterans with high disability ratings receive full “concurrent receipt” of payments).

**H.R. 1470 – the Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act.**

**(Latham is a cosponsor).** Requires the VA to provide chiropractic care at half of its medical facilities by December 31, 2009, and all medical centers no later than December 31, 2011. Currently these services are only available at 20% of VA facilities. **Passed the House on May 23, 2007.**

---

**Latham for Congress**

413 Northwestern Avenue

Ames, IA 50010

Phone: 515.232.1000

**[www.TomLatham.com](http://www.TomLatham.com)**

Paid for by Latham for Congress